



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
B582m
v. 2

MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES.

VOL. II.

MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES

BY

LADY BLAKE

AUTHOR OF

“CLAUDE,” “HELEN’S FIRST LOVE,”

“THE HISTORY OF A HEART,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1878.

All rights reserved.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

823

B 582 m

v. 2

MR. AND MRS. FANSHAW.

(CONTINUED.)

MR. AND MRS. FANSHAW.

CHAPTER III.

NOT long after this, I had an early call one morning from the two Miss Middletons, the aunt and niece. Miss Eleanor Middleton, the elder of the two ladies, was a gentle, pleasing, elderly lady, who had been a beauty in her youth, and was still very nice and ladylike in appearance. Tall and very fair, with a slender figure and very sweet manners, she was a general favourite ; one only wondered how she had managed to remain “unappropriated” all the years of her life. No doubt she had some little “heart-history” hidden away from the world’s knowledge that had

so shaped her course through life. But whatever had been her experiences, they had exercised no souring influence on her gentle, woman-like nature. From the time of her sister-in-law's early death, she had devoted herself to the care of her brother's two children, and she was dearly loved by both, as well as by the brother who at that time so greatly needed her sympathy and help.

It was fortunate for Millicent Middleton that her aunt's temper and disposition were cast in such a different mould from her own, for her hard, determined character would never have brooked the control of another equally rigid and exacting. For the most part, she had generally been ready to defer to her aunt's gentle rule, and it reflected credit on both to observe the perfect harmony that subsisted between the gentle aunt and more decided niece. Though Millicent liked her own way so well, she never took it in opposi-

tion to Miss Middleton. Thus, when these two widely dissimilar ladies appeared that morning, and showed by their countenances that their visit was more than one of ordinary civility, I felt sure they were agreed upon their verdict before the case was entered on.

As I suspected, I soon became aware that their object was to discuss the subject of Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw with me—to express their own opinion, and to demand mine. Miss Middleton the younger opened the case by saying,

“I am sure, Mrs. Grey, you will excuse my aunt and me on our appealing to you on this very painful subject, but we both feel too deeply concerned in all that touches my dear brother to shrink from speaking out honestly before it may be too late both in regard to his honour and his happiness.”

To this I replied—

“You are quite right, dear Miss Middle-

ton, to do any and everything you can in such a cause ; but excuse me, I do not see how *I* can be in any way implicated in the matter."

Here the elder Miss Middleton looked appealingly at her niece, whilst she gently murmured,

"No, certainly not. I think, Milly dear, you had better confine yourself to the single request we had to make, and that was—" looking away from me, for fear of hurting my feelings ; but before she had framed her request in sufficiently gentle terms, her niece interposed abruptly with—

"Only to ask you, Mrs. Grey, to be so kind as not to allow my brother and Mrs. Fanshaw to make your house their place of meeting. Do not be angry," she continued, seeing I certainly looked a little ruffled ; "we do not presume or dream of blaming *you* in any respect, for we have done the same thing ourselves, and the

cloak and excuse for these meetings have been musical practice in both cases."

She paused for a moment, and then, as I collected my thoughts, I felt they were not to blame for an anxiety which I had myself felt on the last occasion of seeing Mrs. Fanshaw and Henry Middleton together at my house. So I asked them quietly what it was they wished me to do, seeing I had no power over one or the other, but suggesting that, if they would keep Henry away from calling at my house, no harm could be done there. Then the elder of the ladies spoke in a slightly plaintive voice, saying,

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Grey, if we *could* have done *that*, we need not have troubled you with this call, or mentioned this sad affair—should we, Millicent?"

The young lady, thus appealed to, gave an impatient toss to her head, and replied,

"Of course not, but Mrs. Grey must be aware that young men *cannot* be kept from

calling on any person, or at any house where they may choose to visit, and it is only by denying them the *entrée* that the desired end can be obtained."

"Then," I replied, "you really wish me to tell my servant to say 'Not at home' when Mr. Henry Middleton calls?"

Both the ladies looked a little confused, but Miss Eleanor faltered out,

"Only when Mrs. Fanshaw is with you."

"But would not that give an undesirable degree of publicity to the case altogether?" I meekly suggested, to which Millicent hastily answered—

"Of course it would, and no one could really desire such a thing; only, dear Mrs. Grey, if you would—if you *could* let Mrs. Fanshaw be made in some degree aware of your opinion, and how disgraceful and shocking it is that she, a married woman, should go on and encourage my brother in the way, I am sorry to say, she has done of late, perhaps she would consider

a little, and not try to meet him at your house."

I could only shake my head, and point out the difficulty of the part they had assigned to me, saying I knew absolutely nothing of Mrs. Fanshaw's private concerns, and could hardly interfere in so delicate a matter in the way they seemed to require. I was as desirous as they could be to prevent any meeting that could be avoided, especially in my own house, between Mrs. Fanshaw and Mr. Middleton; but they must see, unless they could persuade him to avoid such dangerous intimacy, there was always Mrs. Fanshaw's own house open to him, and it was to be feared that Mr. Fanshaw was a mere cipher both in his own house and elsewhere.

"Oh! worse, worse!—infinitely worse!" exclaimed Millicent, indignantly. "He brought his wife the other day to our house, and I found from him that she and

Henry had been playing and singing for an hour or two at your house the preceding day, and that he had brought his wife, at Henry's request, to give him and us a little more of her 'charming melody.'"

"It strikes me," said I, in answer to this tirade, "that in all probability Mr. Fanshaw, and his wife also, accepted your brother's musical invitation in all simplicity as such, intending to do you and him a kindness, and, knowing their own proficiency, were sincerely anxious to oblige you all."

"Possibly that *might* have been the case," observed Miss Middleton, with a gentle sigh.

Her niece was not so easily appeased.

"I wish I *could* think so," she said, "and that I could have any of the pleasure I once had in seeing Mrs. Fanshaw at our house, and Mr. Fanshaw also, who, in spite of his odd looks and manners, is an excellent performer on the guitar, and has

given me many useful hints" (she might have said *lessons*); "but since it has pleased my brother to become so infatuated with the lady, and her husband is so extremely complaisant on the occasion, you can hardly wonder, Mrs. Grey, that, as far as lies in my power, I wish to discountenance their meetings, whether under pretence of music or anything else? and, therefore, it is on that account that my aunt and I have called this morning to ask your kind assistance."

"But in what way?" said I, sorry for my young friends, and yet seeing the reasonableness of Miss Middleton's apprehensions.

"Well," replied Millicent, musing, "you might let my brother see by your manner that you do not countenance their meeting at your house, and perhaps you could prevent any musical entertainment. Pray forgive my apparent dictation; my interest in my only brother must plead my excuse,

and I believe you have hitherto taken a very kind interest in Mrs. Fanshaw, and would be glad to save her from the consequences of her folly."

"Indeed you are right; I have a sincere interest in and liking for Mrs. Fanshaw. She may be inconsiderate, but I have always found her very simple and right-minded on all subjects we have discussed, and her husband is, I think, very single-hearted, and though there is some mystery attached to their marriage, I feel sure there is nothing disgraceful attending it."

"Oh!" said Millicent, "I have long been convinced that it is a runaway match, and that the lady has bestowed herself on a man in an inferior position in life, charmed, no doubt, by his musical talents, or some undiscovered perfections she may have imagined him to possess; but they have been here a whole year, and no one (I mean friends of their own) has ever been

to see them, and I imagine they never receive any letters."

"Yes, I know they do, for Mr. Fanshaw one day asked Dr. Grey to inquire if there were any at the post-office either for him or his wife, and he found a foreign one lying there for him."

The elder Miss Middleton opened her gentle eyes at this piece of information, and observed,

"Well, I am glad the young couple are not quite friendless, and hitherto they have conducted themselves in the most blameless manner, and, I hear, have been most exact and scrupulous in all their payments; and besides that, I have been told they are very kind and charitable to the poor people who live near there."

"Yes, it is quite true. I have also heard many a tale of their charity and kindness, and they both look so young, and she is so pretty and attractive, it would

be a thousand pities if any unkind whispers got about to injure them."

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Grey," said the younger Miss Middleton, very stiffly. "I should be sorry for Mrs. Fanshaw, but my first concern is for my brother." And after a little more discussion, much to the same purpose, the two Miss Middletons took their departure.

After they were gone, I turned the matter over in my own mind as to the course that I had best pursue, but I did not care to take the initiative in the matter, so could only wait and trust that, when the time for action came (possibly by the pair meeting, as they had done before, at my house), that I might be able to make the *seance* sufficiently unpleasant and unprofitable to deter Mr. Henry Middleton at least from again seeking to enjoy Mrs. Fanshaw's charming society and bewitching music at my expense. Then the thought flashed into my mind

that the gentleman would in that case seek the lady (if he was so determined) at her own house ; but I was comforted by the reflection that *there* he was always sure of finding her husband also, and stupid and blindly complaisant as they might consider him, still his mere presence must have a wholesome effect on the memories both of his wife and her too evident admirer ; besides, I believed the young married couple to have been hitherto attached to each other, though I felt there might be danger for the young wife when she compared her husband with other men in her own rank of life, with all social and natural advantages, especially when contrasted with a person so liberally and charmingly endowed as in the person of Mr. Henry Middleton.

Some time, however, passed away after the Miss Middletons' visit, whilst my own resolutions formed in consequence had ample space to mature and gain shape and

substance against the arrival of the hour of need. That hour seemed in no hurry to come, for Henry Middleton's visits ceased as abruptly as they had begun. Dora Fanshaw, too, came but seldom, as compared with her former habit of calling so frequently at all times and seasons. I began to fear that all was not well with her, for when she did come, she had a hurried, preoccupied look, quite different from the gentle calm of manner which had distinguished her in former days. Still she was amiable and affectionate as ever in these brief visits, but even those, I began to fancy, were paid more as a matter of obligation than gratification.

I confess to having felt rather hurt on my own account, but I had still sufficient interest in Dora to feel uneasy on hers individually. I really knew so very little about the past history of my young friend and her husband, and yet, when she was with me, I always remarked such a genuine

simplicity of manner and sincerity in conversation, that it induced me to believe there was not much to know, or perhaps to conceal in their past lives, and what there might be was only of importance to themselves. They were Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw to all intents and purposes—unequally paired, it might be said, but with their own free will and consent, and as no one had apparently sought them since they came amongst us, the inference was that they were more destitute of friends and relations than the rest of the world, and that surmise might partly account for two waifs and strays of such different (as was supposed) positions casting in their lots together.

About that time it happened that, not having seen anything either of Mrs. Fanshaw or her husband for a week or two, passing near their house, I was induced to call there and make some civil inquiries. They might, one or the other, be ill, or

they might be absent. I would, at all events, call at their house. I rang the bell, and the door was opened to me by Mr. Fanshaw himself, who begged me to come in, so I accordingly walked upstairs and sat down in the pretty little drawing-room.

“Mrs. Fanshaw is out,” he said. “She is walking, but I expect her home every moment. She would be sorry to miss seeing Madame when so kind as to call—” would I wait one little moment?

Thus pressed, I could not do otherwise than say I would wait a few minutes in the hope of seeing Mrs. Fanshaw, as I had not enjoyed that pleasure for some time. Mr. Fanshaw took a seat just behind me, so that I could not see him as we talked; but he was so very plain and common-looking that I did not consider his position a disadvantageous one. He had evidently been reading before I came in, and the book was still open on the table. It was a volume of French plays. As I glanced at

it, I remarked, by way of something to say,

“You are very constant to the theatre, I see, Mr. Fanshaw.”

“Ah, yes, I have a passion for it, I do not deny—at least, the musical part of the representation.”

“You have little opportunity of enjoying that here, I fear, Mr. Fanshaw.”

“Ah! *le bon temps viendra!* we do not complain—we are happy here.”

“I am glad to hear it, so I hope you and Mrs. Fanshaw will remain at Castleford for some time.”

This was said more as a remark *en passant* than one requiring an answer, but my companion evidently considered I had put it as a feeler, and was desirous to know something more than it suited him to reveal; he answered cautiously,

“I cannot answer for Mrs. Fanshaw; I am in all things guided by her wishes; we are here to-day, but we may be gone to-

morrow. Still she is very content, and whilst she is so I am the same—*toujours content.*”

A most exemplary model of a husband, thought I; but after a few questions relative to Mrs. Fanshaw's absence at that particular time, with the answers received, I began to think that a man might be a little too exemplary even in that relation.

CHAPTER IV.

THE result of these communications disclosed the fact that Mrs. Fanshaw was out walking, and that she was not alone, and further still, that Henry Middleton was her companion.

“He came,” said Mr. Fanshaw, “kindly to take her to see some gardens—‘*botanical*,’ they were named, and there she is to see some rare plants, and some flowers of a beauty incredible.”

“I wonder that such lovely things did not tempt you also, Mr. Fanshaw,” said I, by no means feeling as “content” as he expressed himself, and wishing to make my retreat before the lady and her cavalier appeared on the scene ; so I rose and said

I could stay no longer that day, but might perhaps come some other. I qualified my speech and my proceeding in that way, but not feeling much inclination to repeat my visit under all circumstances.

“Oh! don't go yet,” he replied. “You like to see Mrs. Fanshaw, and Monsieur Middleton—surely he is a favourite of yours?”

This was asked in a tone of interrogation, so I felt bound to reply that I liked Mr. Middleton very well.

“Ah, but he is *charmant*, is he not, and rich?—oh! I hear he is very rich. He must be what you call *très bon parti*, is he not?”

I felt rather disgusted, and only answered curtly that very likely he was, but I had never considered the subject of his riches, and possibly they were at present entirely under the control of his father; and then I rose up, and saying “good morning,” walked towards the door.

Whilst in the act of opening it, I heard the door below open also, and then voices talking and laughing, and steps ascending the stairs proclaimed that the lady of the house and her attendant were returned.

“Ah! I am glad!” exclaimed my companion. “She would have been *desolée* not to have seen Madame. Ah! here she is!” and he held the door open for Mrs. Fanshaw and Mr. Middleton to enter.

I was annoyed, as I greatly disliked and objected to making one of that party, and coolly returning Dora’s eager greeting, said I had already waited some time, and must be going home. I then looked her steadily in the face, hoping that my gravity might awaken some sense of the dangerous part she was playing. I then observed that Mrs. Fanshaw *did* perhaps look a little conscious, but she also looked extremely pretty; her hands were full of flowers, and she held them out to her husband, quietly telling him to put them in water, “*tout de*

suite," and he turned with pleased alacrity to do her bidding. I then just raised my eyes to Henry Middleton, only intending to make him a passing bow, but he had no eyes for me. I was shocked and distressed to see the manner in which they were riveted on the fair face of Mr. Fanshaw's wife; there was no doubting the feeling with which he regarded her. I could not resist saying one word that might serve either as a warning or reproof, as he might take it. I was comparatively an old woman, and had known him all my life, and esteemed his father and family very sincerely, so I said,

"Good morning, Mr. Middleton. I am going to call at your father's; if I see your aunt and sister, I can mention having left you here."

The young man's face underwent a sudden alteration as I said that; the glowing, happy look subsided, and one of annoyance and half anger replaced it as he said,

“You are very kind, Mrs. Grey, but I do not think my relatives feel much interest in my whereabouts, unless I fail to present myself at seven o’clock.” Then, seeing I was about to depart without further parley, he suddenly changed his tone, and said—“I, too, am going home directly, so, as you are kind enough to purpose calling there, perhaps you will allow me to be your companion?”

I was rather surprised at this sudden piece of civility, but I liked the young man, and wished him well, so I would not utter the curt refusal that hovered on my lips, and only bent my head in acceptance of his proposal. Then I observed a lingering hand-shake and parting pressure, and caught the look which was given and returned between him and Mrs. Fanshaw, whilst the unnoticed husband walked away to the window during the ceremony of taking leave. I was too much vexed with Dora to notice the offer of her kiss, and

hardly touched the little hand she held out to me.

I was glad to leave the house, and feel the fresh breeze on my flushed cheek. I was not sanguine enough to expect to do any good to a young man in the midst of his folly and infatuation, and, therefore, never dreamt of entering on any subject but the most common-place during my uncomfortable walk with Henry Middleton.

After I had exhausted the ordinary topics which occurred to me, and to which he replied in a short, absent manner, we both relapsed into silence.

When we had performed about half of our distance, he asked me abruptly if I did not think Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw "remarkably nice people." I wondered at his audacity in putting the question, as I felt sure that he saw I suspected the nature of his feelings towards Mrs. Fanshaw, and I was quite sure that he had only decided

on accompanying me to his father's house that his presence might prevent any communication on my part, or discussion on theirs, relative to himself and his infatuation. When he quietly asked me this question, I looked up at him to see in what spirit it was made. He was looking steadfastly down on the ground, and never glanced towards me, but I could detect the ghost of a smile hovering about his lips, though the rest of his countenance was perfectly composed. The smile, as well as the question, annoyed me, and I answered, as shortly as possible,

“There is no doubt that *you* think so.”

“Yes, indeed I do, beyond a doubt,” answered the young man, earnestly; “but I was led to imagine that you were of the same opinion. I have heard so much of your and Dr. Grey's great kindness towards the young couple,” and he smiled again, more openly than before.

I fell into the snare thus spread for me,

and baited with so much *charity and kindness*, and felt more amiable ; then, dropping a little of my stiffness, I replied—

“When Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw first came here, we were very glad to show them any little kindness and civility in our power, but since that time they have made new friends, and are become more independent of us, we have naturally seen less of them.”

“Indeed !” answered the young man. “That seems a pity, for I do not like to think that old friends are to give place to new ones. Surely there is room for all ?”

“That may be, but if friends are to retain their old places in our estimation, they must remain the same themselves.”

“And you think that some are changed ? We were speaking of the Fanshaws—may I ask have you seen any reason to think differently of them ?”

“That is a very searching question, Mr. Middleton,” I answered, somewhat hastily.

He was silent for a minute, and then replied—

“You must forgive me, Mrs. Grey, if I venture to say I think you are entertaining a prejudice, and are under an error at variance with your usual spirit of candour and charity in judging others.”

I felt almost angry at his pertinacity, and entirely disinclined to continue the argument, and therefore replied, rather impatiently,

“I am sorry you think me wanting in candour and charity, in consequence of my seeing people and things in the reflection of some new light in which they may have unfortunately appeared; but the subject is none of my seeking—it is an unpleasant one, and I wish to drop it.”

He answered,

“Certainly. You are right; no good, perhaps, can come in talking of any subject, unless prepared to do so with perfect openness and unreserve. As this cannot

be so, I fear, in the present case (at least, at this time), I will say no more ; only," he added, gently and persuasively—"only, dear Mrs. Grey, do let me entreat you to suspend any judgment you may be induced to form to the prejudice of others, and—forgive me—of one especially whom you *have* loved, and who is still greatly attached to you, and grateful for all past kindness, and I may say, from all I have seen, is so pure and perfect herself."

I could not resist this opening to remark,

"I suppose you allude to Mrs. Fanshaw?" and as the young man only bent his head in reply, I continued by saying—"You must forgive me if I return your caution against hasty and unkind judgment by one equally well intended, and that is to warn you that there may be as much danger in indulging in sentiments of over-admiration and too highly-wrought regard as in falling short in our estimation of our friends."

I stopped abruptly, for I had said even more than I had intended.

Henry Middleton, after a moment's hesitation, said,

“I think I see your meaning, dear Mrs. Grey, and, believe me, I appreciate your caution, even though it may not apply to the case in point, for, believe me, I could never entertain a feeling in the direction you indicate that would be hurtful to the object of it.”

I said no more, and hastily changed the subject, for I felt annoyed and vexed at having been, as it were, compelled to enter ever so slightly on one so distasteful to Henry Middleton. I saw no more of him for some days, neither did the Fanshaws come near me. I, on my part, kept aloof. I did not care to call again whilst the recollection of my last visit was so painfully vivid; at the same time, I felt a certain uneasiness at the idea that I was abandoning my young friend in a time of peril,

and felt inclined more than once to go and see Dora again.

Whilst I was thus meditating, I had an unexpected visit from the other delinquent, Henry Middleton. He came in one afternoon, but other callers were present, so our conversation was common to all. When he rose to say good-bye, he remarked it was really "good-bye" in earnest, as he was going away for some time, and had come to say so. I was glad to hear this piece of news, but could not well say so. I only asked a few common-place questions as to his destination, and the probable length of his absence. He told me his journey was partly on matters of business, but he hoped to make it one of pleasure also. He was going to Vienna first, but he wished to pass the Winter in Paris.

"Then we shall not see you back for some months?" I asked.

"Probably not till the Spring," was the

answer, and, after a few more words, we parted.

I felt very glad that Henry Middleton was going away; it would put a stop to all idle gossip, which, I had reason to believe, had already been at work in connecting his name with that of Mrs. Fanshaw. It was a wise step on his part, but I had a sort of impression that perhaps it had been forced upon him by his father, in consequence of some communication made to him by the ladies of his family. However that might have been, I saw that the young man himself yielded readily enough to the suggestion, and I wished him much benefit in every way from his proposed expedition.

I heard of his departure a few days after, and that event removed any objections I had entertained in going again to the Fanshaws' house, and also cleared away many unpleasant feelings, for I liked, almost loved Dora, and was ready

to make every excuse for her. Though I had been angry with her, I did not like to believe that she would consciously and deliberately encourage either Mr. Middleton or herself in such a fatal preference. I greatly blamed the stupidity and blindness of Mr. Fanshaw as the chief cause of any mischief that might have ensued. He evidently was delighted with the young man's frequent visits and attention to his wife—not suspecting that any evil could arise from them, only admiring him as very rich, and as being a “*très bon parti*.” After all, people might be *too* single-hearted and unsuspecting, as I tried to believe was the case in the present instance, for I could not endure to think otherwise.

I lost no time, then, in going to see Mrs. Fanshaw. I fancied she might be feeling hurt at my coolness the last time I was at her house, or she might resent the inference which she must have perceived gave rise to it.

I found Dora Fanshaw alone when I went to her house. She seemed a little flurried as I entered, but there was not a trace of anger or annoyance on her sweet countenance; she appeared delighted to see me again, and without a word being spoken that could reflect upon or explain the past misunderstanding, I felt assured that all was right again with her and between ourselves. She was very cheerful, too—evidently she was not grieving at the defection or departure of Henry Middleton—there was no effort in her manner; she had lost that preoccupied and *distract* manner I had noticed in her for some time before his departure. Her mind was apparently more at ease, and it was reflected in her manner and on her countenance. My mind was in consequence much relieved, and I felt some compunction for having suspected her for a moment of encouraging and entertaining an unworthy feeling.

We had a very pleasant half-hour alone before Mr. Fanshaw returned, and then I understood that he had been "marketing" for their small household; he told me he did everything himself, and seemed to find it a pleasant occupation.

The pretty wife looked on with such a pleased, indulgent smile that I could but wonder again, as I had done so often through the whole course of my acquaintance with this strangely-assorted pair.

Soon after, with the want of tact that seemed peculiar to him, Mr. Fanshaw entered on the subject that I had considered tabooed, and had purposely avoided; however, he observed—

"So our good friend, Mr. Middleton, is gone. Ah, how sorry you must be!—he will be so great a loss to all his friends."

I curtly replied "that it would not make much difference to *me*, though it might probably do so to *him*."

There was something, I suppose, however unintentional, in the tone of my voice that made Dora look up quickly at her husband, and, for the first time since my acquaintance with them, I observed something like a look of reproach or disapprobation on her countenance, and I was almost astonished at the instantaneous effect it produced on the recipient. His countenance fell, and he returned the look of reproof with one of such evident humble contrition that the wife smiled again at him, as she said, in her usual sweet tone,

“You have well done, *mon ami*, in all that you have purchased. Will you now kindly give directions to our servant on the matter?”

At that hint the obsequious husband vanished, taking with him a basket that had been the companion of his marketing expedition; and then Dora became as charming again as before the interruption,

and we parted with renewed warmth of friendship, and promises of frequent meetings for the future.

CHAPTER V.

IT happened, towards the close of that year, that I was called from home by the serious illness of a near relative, and then, falling ill myself, was detained long beyond the time originally fixed for my return. Other circumstances combined to lengthen my absence, so it was not till April in the following Spring that I found myself at home again.

One of my first inquiries was after the Fanshaws, for I had kept up no correspondence with Dora—in fact, though we had met much as usual after our unspoken reconciliation, she had not asked me to write to her whilst I was away, and I had but little time to do so had she made the request.

I was told Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw were still in their old house, and had been living as quietly and uneventfully as hitherto. During the Winter, which had been very severe, they had gone out very little, and had remained even more secluded. I was afraid my young friends were becoming quite unsociable, and that I might find it difficult to renew my former intimate acquaintance with Dora, for I found, although the Miss Middletons had made an attempt to resume their musical meetings with Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, they had been quite unsuccessful in inducing them to come again to their house. I was, therefore, very agreeably surprised one morning, when I had been at home only a few days, to hear Mrs. Fanshaw's name announced, and to welcome my friend Dora as an early visitor. She was looking in perfect health and beauty, so indisposition had no share in her seclusion.

I fancied there was rather more ease

and self-possession in her manner when she first came into the room—that she had lost something of that gentle timidity of address which I had often remarked in her before, but she was equally attractive in her new phase of brightness and cheerfulness. She seemed, too, so sincerely pleased to see me again, but said,

“I was so afraid you might not return in time, dear Mrs. Grey, for me to see you before my departure.”

I had heard nothing of this intention till that moment, so could only express the surprise and regret I felt at the announcement. Mrs. Fanshaw then told me they were about to leave Castleford in two or three days.

“Ah!” said I, “you and Mr. Fanshaw have got tired at last of our dull little town, and are about to say good-bye to it, and all your friends in it, so I fear you are not likely to come back very soon.”

“No, not very soon, I fear; but some

day or other I hope we shall all meet again."

And then came a pause, in which all I could find to say was, "I hope so indeed."

After a while, Dora looked up with a bright smile, and said,

"My birthday will be the day after to-morrow; I shall be of age then; and then, I am happy to say, I shall be independent."

I laughed as I replied—

"As independent, perhaps, you mean, as any married woman *can* be."

"Yes, of course I mean that," she said, with an answering laugh that sounded very sweet, and as if her conjugal obligations were easy to endure. And then she told me they purposed leaving Castleford the following day, for she had much important business to transact in reference to this epoch in her life, and for that reason, if for no other, they must be going away directly. After that communication,

Dora paused again, and hesitated with a little of her former timidity, as she said she had come to ask a favour, and that was, that Dr. Grey and I would come and see her on her birthday, adding, "I should like to receive some good wishes from those I love, and whose kindness has been so great to two poor wanderers during their stay here ; and I should like, also, to say a few parting words to you both. Will you come at two o'clock ? I will have some luncheon for you in honour of the event, if you will take it with us."

I could not refuse the request so kindly and prettily made, and besides, I felt every inclination to see as much as I could of my charming friend, and also I rather hoped the few "last words" she so slightly alluded to might throw some light on her past history, as well as the future destination of herself and husband, so I readily accepted her invitation for myself and for Dr. Grey, if he were disengaged.

It was late in the day before I had an opportunity of mentioning Dora's request to my husband. He seemed to ponder a little while over the invitation, and then observed, with a smile, that through a strange coincidence which had occurred that day, we appeared on the point of obtaining more insight into the past history of our friends, the Fanshaws, during the last day or two of their stay than had fallen to our lot in any way during the year and a half of their sojourn amongst us.

In reply to my eager inquiry as to the other circumstance to which he alluded, Dr. Grey told me that, as he was passing the "King's Head" inn, on his way to visit a patient who lived near, the landlord came out and begged him to step in for one moment to see a gentleman who had arrived by that morning's train, and was making inquiries after Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, and had understood Dr. Grey had

visited them there on their first arrival, after the railway accident at Castleford.

“I went in at this request,” continued Dr. Grey, “and found a gentlemanly-looking man, middle-aged, very quiet, and rather precise in manner, who tendered me his card, making many apologies for the liberty he was taking, but said he came on business of a very important nature, which would, he trusted, plead his excuse. He then proceeded to say he understood that I had attended Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw” (he hesitated for a moment over the name) “at that same inn, professionally, he believed, and had since visited them on terms of intimacy? I could only bow an affirmative to these suppositions, and then glanced at the card the gentleman had placed in my hands; it bore the printed name of ‘Mr. Lawford,’ and under it was written in pencil, ‘Solicitor, New Square, Lincoln’s Inn.’

“ ‘Yes, sir, that is my name and profes-

sion,' the gentleman continued, as he followed the direction of my eyes, 'and, of course, you can know nothing about me, but I am come on business relating to Mrs.—Mrs. Fanshaw, being solicitor to her mother, and her late husband, Mr. Rivers; but,' he added, 'Mrs. Rivers has been some time re-married, and is now Madame la Marquise de Fleury, and I still continue to act for Madame de Fleury as her legal adviser in her English affairs.'

"When I had listened thus far," said Dr. Grey, "I found the time was slipping away, and that I could not afford to stay any longer listening to the family history of Madame la Marquise, in which, I suppose, is involved that of our young friend also; so, to be brief, I made an appointment with Mr. Lawford to come here tomorrow at twelve, thinking you would be a valuable help at the conference, and trusting we may hear something to the advantage of Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw."

I hoped so also, but was not quite as sanguine as my husband, and could not help entertaining a slight misgiving that some evil was impending over them, and that Mr. Lawford was the agent who was to bring it to pass.

Under that impression, I could not bring myself to bestow a very cordial welcome on the gentleman, as he presented himself at our house with praiseworthy punctuality. As soon as our introductory greetings had been duly made and acknowledged, I prefaced the conversation by telling Mr. Lawford that I had been on terms of very pleasant intimacy with Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw since they had been residing in Castleford, but that I was entirely ignorant of everything that concerned their past history, and had no desire to hear anything of their private affairs but what it might suit them to tell me themselves.

In answer to this, Mr. Lawford said he

had no desire to enter on any private affairs ; he just wished to ask me and Dr. Grey a common-place question, only giving us in return such information concerning his clients as was patent to all who knew them. Dr. Grey then asked what might be the question he wished to ask us ; when he mentioned it, we found it easy to answer—"Whether we had ever entertained any doubt as to the marriage of the two persons who called themselves Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw?" Of course we declared we entertained none whatever ; they had sought no concealment from the first, and had always spoken of themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, man and wife.

"That is all," replied Mr. Lawford. "I have no doubt they *are* married, and have been so from the time Miss Rivers left her mother's house ; it is only the confirmation of that fact I seek from those who have known the young couple intimately since the step was taken—and a very un-

fortunate one, I fear, it is likely to prove for Miss Rivers."

"For Mrs. Fanshaw, you mean," I amended.

Mr. Lawford shook his legal head as he said, "No, that is an error. I have every reason to believe that Fanshaw is only an assumed name; the man she chose to elope with, and, as I have reason to believe, she married before she left France, is called Alphonse or Adolphe—I believe it is Adolphe Meyer."

"A Frenchman, I suppose?" said Dr. Grey.

"Yes, a Frenchman, and musician at one of the theatres. By her unhappy marriage without her mother's sanction, she loses a large fortune, which would have been hers to-morrow had she not, as I say, taken this incomprehensible step."

I groaned in spirit at hearing this sad history, and could not resist inquiring what reason could have induced such a

girl as Miss Rivers to quit her own position in life, and throw away all her prospects, for the sake of a man who, although no doubt talented and amiable, and devotedly attached to her, was evidently so greatly her inferior in every respect, except, I might say, in musical talent. But was it possible that *that* was the sole inducement and excuse ?

“Not entirely, perhaps,” said Mr. Lawford, pondering. “I have reason to believe that another marriage proposed to her was very distasteful, so to avoid that she fled from Scylla into Charybdis.”

“So it seems,” observed Dr. Grey, drily ; and then added, in a more genial tone—
“But I am happy to be able to give my testimony, and my wife’s also, to the exemplary manner in which the young couple have conducted themselves, and the perfect and happy understanding that seems to exist between them. Nothing can exceed Monsieur Meyer’s devotion to his

wife, and as yet she never appears to have regretted the choice she has made, and we can only hope she never may; and now, having said all that it is possible for us to do under these unfortunate circumstances, perhaps it will be better to decline all further discussion of the matter."

Mr. Lawford bowed very stiffly as Dr. Grey said this, and taking up his hat in token of departure, only remarked—

"I am expecting Madame la Marquise this afternoon; she may, or she may not, choose to see her daughter, who has set her authority so entirely at defiance; but as Madame Meyer attains her majority to-morrow, it is needful that she and her husband should understand the forfeiture involved in her unauthorised marriage. The fifty thousand pounds to which she would have been entitled passes to her mother, who has hitherto enjoyed the interest of it, to keep or to bestow as she pleases."

“No doubt,” thought I, uncharitably, “it will be bestowed on her foreign husband, le Marquis.” But one more remark I made as we were exchanging good-bye—

“I hope that Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw will not be destitute of all means. They seem to have lived very comfortably hitherto.”

“Probably they will have a competence,” answered the lawyer, “and I am glad to think so. I know Miss Rivers was entitled to some money on the death of the aunt with whom she lived, and received it immediately after that event, and I believe also young Meyer was making something considerable by his musical talents.”

I was glad and relieved to hear that, though I felt very dissatisfied with the lot in life that my pretty, refined Dora had in an evil hour chosen for herself.

The next day came, and I was half uncertain whether the Fanshaws (I could

not help calling them by the old familiar name) would still expect us, as possibly that terrible Mr. Lawford had already been breaking in on their peaceful little household with his unwelcome tidings. When I mentioned my scruples to Dr. Grey, he only replied,

“*Raison de plus*; we must keep our engagement by all means.”

So at the appointed hour we set out, and soon found ourselves in the well-known little drawing-room, now looking all *en fête*, adorned with flowers, and a table with a snowy cloth set out in a corner of the little apartment, tastefully arranged with more flowers, and spread with the tempting luncheon that we had been invited to partake of.

As soon as I looked at the two young people, I felt sure that as yet no unpleasant tidings or visitors had disturbed their innocent festivity. Mr. Fanshaw, or Meyer, was rather more demonstrative than usual

in his welcome, and Dora presented both pretty cheeks in succession, French fashion, to receive my salute and birthday good wishes. We then sat down to table, and Mr. Fanshaw pledged both Dr. Grey and me in sparkling wine to drink to the "queen of the day," whilst Dora looked up affectionately at her husband, and returned tearful thanks to him and us for all our "great goodness" to her.

After our little repast, Mr. Fanshaw got up hastily, and holding out his hand alternately to Dr. Grey and me with a lingering pressure, he declared he must say "farewell," for he had "much preparation to make for to-morrow," and vanished into the bed-room which adjoined. I felt sure the amiable man had withdrawn himself to leave his wife more at liberty to tell us any part of their little history that might suit her best, and without the *gêne* of a listener so nearly concerned in it.

Dora laughed a little shyly as the door

of the room closed upon her husband, and turning to Dr. Grey, began to make some remarks on the flowers which so profusely adorned their room, and which, with the early strawberries that graced their table, were evidently hot-house productions.

Whilst I was meditating rather sorrowfully on the evident taste displayed for luxury in these trifles, and thought of the impending blow that would sweep away all their fairy plans and pleasurable prospects, I overheard a few words, uttered by Dora, which gave me inexpressible pain; they were only—

“Oh, no, Dr. Grey; we do not as yet aspire to such expensive luxuries, even to welcome our best friends. All these flowers and fruits come from the same bountiful and kind friend, Mr. Henry Middleton.”

I looked round hastily at Dora as she said this, but though there was a slight flush, there was neither shame nor confu-

sion on her sweet face, and as I asked, "Then he is returned?" she answered, quietly, "Yes, last night."

CHAPTER VI.

AND so the foolish, infatuated young man had returned, but only just in time to see his charmer depart!—and was it not that consideration that urged his return just at that particular time? And yet, what could prevent Henry Middleton from seeing and following the Fanshaws wherever they might choose to go?

Neither Dora nor her husband seemed to have any suspicion of evil resulting from their intimacy, and yet I could not reconcile the deepened colour on her fair cheek with the look of unfeigned affection she gave her husband when he drank her health as “queen of the day.”

I was absorbed in these unsatisfactory speculations, when Dora, suddenly ceasing

to address herself to Dr. Grey, turned to me and said,

“ I am afraid, dear Mrs. Grey, I was the cause of your being troubled with an unpleasant visitor yesterday.”

I hardly knew what to say, when my husband, in his straightforward way, answered,

“ Yes—you mean Mr. Lawford? He came to see us, as you rightly conjecture, on your account.”

Then Dora said, after a moment's thought,

“ Of course I cannot tell what he said, but I can guess the principal design of the communication was to tell you in part what I hoped to relate to you myself—at least, not *his* version of the story, but my own, which may turn out slightly dissimilar. Will you kindly listen to me?”

“ With pleasure,” said Dr. Grey, answering for us both, “ and the more so because there is almost everything left for you to

tell. We did not encourage any discussion either about yourself or your family; we preferred hearing anything you might choose to tell us from yourself, or let the whole subject rest."

"Thank you, my dear friends. I said the other day I had a few words to say to you, and now it is doubly needful that you should rest under no mistake as to the reasons which urged me to take the step I did in leaving my natural home, and the protection of my mother. I daresay Mr. Lawford has told you our name was Rivers. My father was the younger son of a good but impoverished family; he had energy and enterprise, and was the maker of his own fortune. He died several years ago, and left about a hundred thousand pounds, which he settled on my mother and myself. My mother came into immediate possession of her share; mine remained in the hands of trustees, of whom Mr. Lawford is one, to be paid to me on

the day of my coming of age, if single, or if I married with my mother's consent; if I did otherwise, being under the prescribed age, my share—£50,000—passed into my mother's hands, to be dealt with as she should see fit. I was an only child, and my mother and I were almost alone in the world, for we had few relations; the only one I ever saw was a maiden sister of my father's, my Aunt Alice.

“After a few years, we went abroad, and whilst there, my mother met with and married le Marquis de Fleury. He wanted money, and my mother coveted rank, so they each got what they desired, but not much more. Nevertheless, they appeared on the surface to agree very well, for they were people who respected *les convenances*, and were equally devoted to the world. They had each a child by a former marriage, but they did not allow their claims to interfere much with their own pursuits or amusements. My mother, on her second

marriage, confided me to a favourite maid, a Frenchwoman, who had married an Englishman, my father's confidential clerk, and with them I remained till I was old enough to be sent to school, when I was about ten. My holidays were spent with Aunt Alice, and there I remained till her death, when I was old enough to have finished my education, and to return to my mother, who was living in Paris.

“My faithful nurse and friend, Rosalie, Mrs. Shaw, after seeing me happily settled with Aunt Alice, had returned some time before to her beloved France, her husband being dead—that was my earliest childish grief, for her children had been my play-fellows and friends ever since I could recollect. Great was my delight when I found Rosalie and her family (now greatly reduced in number) settled in Paris, and no control was placed on my seeing as much of them as my heart could desire.

“I was then about eighteen. I had not

been taken out or introduced into any society; my mother said she objected to young girls being seen everywhere and by everybody before they married. I remember, in my ignorance or innocence, asking her how, then, was it likely that they should see anyone they might like well enough to marry? My mother's answer was a reproof to my forwardness and presumption in expecting to be allowed the power of choice in so *trifling* a matter; in fact, it was soon revealed to me that my marriage or betrothal was an accomplished fact. My step-father had decreed that his son, the young Viscount Camille de Fleury, was to be my husband. It was an excellent *mariage de convenance*, and who could say a word against it?

“ I had not seen Camille since we were both children, he being some four or five years older than myself, and up to the time of our meeting again I had never felt the slightest preference for anyone, nor had

anyone shown the least partiality for me. We lived such a retired life at my Aunt Alice's, and besides, I was so young at that time. The Marquis and his son were both absent for several months after I joined the family party. My mother went constantly into society, and left me to my own devices, and the company of my humble friends, which made me perfectly happy. I was passionately fond of music, and Rosalie's children, the two girls, were equally so.

“It was in complaisance to them that about that time I made the acquaintance, and, with my mother's sanction, took lessons of a young man, a very clever performer at one of the theatres. His name was Adolphe Meyer. I was delighted with his proficiency, and we formed a charming little musical quartette. My mother, meanwhile, little heeded what I did, or in what occupations I passed my leisure hours. I had my own suite of rooms in the Hôtel de Fleury, and there I received

my friends, my mother being satisfied if Rosalie or her daughters were with me. She looked upon the former as a most competent duenna, and I had no friends or acquaintances in my own rank of life.

“It was about that time that the Marquis de Fleury came home, and Camille with him, and then my mother informed me of their plans—telling me to prepare for my betrothal as well as to make the acquaintance of my future husband. At that time I did not dream of resisting, I expected to like Camille very much and to find him equally ready to fall in love with me. Well, we met, there was nothing repulsive about the young man, neither was there anything that appeared attractive to me. He was polite, as the occasion and his father required, and the affair was very soon settled. Monsieur le Marquis evidently wished to secure my fortune before I came of age, as I should then have had full power to please myself, if

I remained unmarried ; but he never dreamt of any resistance to his sovereign will or of my discovering before too late that I possessed a will of my own. My mother congratulated me on my good fortune, and gave directions for a splendid trousseau. I looked on half stupefied, but expecting every day to perceive something more like an ardent lover in Camille, yet he hardly ever came near me, except when obliged—he never sought my society, though I was told he admired me and was quite ‘content’ to take me as his wife.

“ Then it came to pass, a whisper came round to me—I can hardly tell from whence, as I went so little into society, but somehow or other I heard with horror and disgust that Camille was the notorious lover and constant follower of a very beautiful and fascinating, but frail French actress. I flew to my mother, asking if this were possible ; she looked very coolly at me and replied, in the French idiom she affected,

“ ‘*Mais que voulez vous ?*—a man cannot be expected to be always *aux petits soins*, and with a little “miss” like you ; he will not make the worse *mari* because he has his little diversions *en attendant*, but it is not discreet or convenable that you, *ma fille*, should enter into these discussions or spy into the proceedings of your *futur*. I fear your Aunt Alice’s counsels *apparemment* have not fitted you for the *rôle distingué* that you are destined to play ; but you may dismiss all fears, Camille has assured me that he finds you *très aimable*, and I know he is about to present you with a charming parure of jewels. *Va donc ! ma fille*, you may feel safe that you will be very happy with *ce cher Vicomte*.’

“ And then my mother dismissed the subject, and myself also, with a frigid embrace. But with the late revelation of Camille’s true character, a great revolution had taken place in my mind, and I saw that I was betrothed to a dissipated,

unprincipled young man, who merely accepted me for his wife as the result of an advantageous family compact, and as having personally no positive objection to myself. And this order of things was with my own mother's full approbation and recognition!

"I felt like a person who had been walking blindfold and restored to sight on the brink of an awful precipice! Even so did I shudder and start back from the step that would ensure destruction. In that moment, what a dreadful prospect presented itself to me in future years as the wife of Camille de Fleury! But I saw no escape at that time; my mother and the Marquis were both pleased with the prospect of the marriage they had arranged, and never contemplated so unlooked-for a proceeding as opposition on my part—in fact, Camille 'was willing,' and why should not I be so? I had, up to this time, accepted the

mother's house all unknown and unsuspected by her, and my dear friends' assistance did facilitate everything to me, but you are in error as to my marriage. Do not be shocked; I never was married."

But how could I help being shocked and horrified at this unexpected and startling avowal? I also saw that it had a marked effect on Dr. Grey's usually composed and self-possessed demeanour. It appeared perfectly awful to us, who had been so well acquainted with the existence of a *Mr.* as well as *Mrs.* Fanshaw, though we were, by that time, aware that the former was no other than the Adolphe Meyer, of whom I hardly wondered she hesitated to speak. *Mrs.* Fanshaw, however, or *Madame Meyer*, or *Miss Rivers*, whichever she might be, sat perfectly composed till we had in some measure recovered from the shock of her communication, and then she said,

"I will endeavour to explain everything, my friends, to your satisfaction."

She was about to continue, when we heard something of a bustle on the narrow staircase, and immediately after the servant entered, saying,

“Please, ma’am, there’s a lady and a gentleman who wish to speak to you,” and straightway Mr. Lawford appeared at the door, ushering in a very fashionably-dressed and elegant lady, whom he announced as “Madame la Marquise de Fleury.”

Dora started from her chair with an exclamation of “Mamma! you here!” and would have taken her hand, but the Marquise raised both hers to wave her daughter away, saying,

“Yes, no doubt you *are* surprised to see me within your doors, after all your shameful conduct. You have indeed caused me a terrible grief; but I come not to disturb you in your conjugal felicity with the *coquin* you have judged worthy to become your husband, *ce mechant* Adolphe

mother's house all unknown and unsuspected by her, and my dear friends' assistance did facilitate everything to me, but you are in error as to my marriage. Do not be shocked; I never was married."

But how could I help being shocked and horrified at this unexpected and startling avowal? I also saw that it had a marked effect on Dr. Grey's usually composed and self-possessed demeanour. It appeared perfectly awful to us, who had been so well acquainted with the existence of a *Mr.* as well as *Mrs.* Fanshaw, though we were, by that time, aware that the former was no other than the Adolphe Meyer, of whom I hardly wondered she hesitated to speak. *Mrs.* Fanshaw, however, or *Madame Meyer*, or *Miss Rivers*, whichever she might be, sat perfectly composed till we had in some measure recovered from the shock of her communication, and then she said,

"I will endeavour to explain everything, my friends, to your satisfaction."

She was about to continue, when we heard something of a bustle on the narrow staircase, and immediately after the servant entered, saying,

“Please, ma’am, there’s a lady and a gentleman who wish to speak to you,” and straightway Mr. Lawford appeared at the door, ushering in a very fashionably-dressed and elegant lady, whom he announced as “Madame la Marquise de Fleury.”

Dora started from her chair with an exclamation of “Mamma! you here!” and would have taken her hand, but the Marquise raised both hers to wave her daughter away, saying,

“Yes, no doubt you *are* surprised to see me within your doors, after all your shameful conduct. You have indeed caused me a terrible grief; but I come not to disturb you in your conjugal felicity with the *coquin* you have judged worthy to become your husband, *ce mechant* Adolphe

Meyer. I only come here to tell you that, recognizing your marriage as contrary to my wishes and injunctions, I cast you off, and in so doing you will be bereft of all your fortune. Mr. Lawford is the witness that I claim it all in the right your poor father gave to me. To-day you attain your majority, and to-day your £50,000 becomes my legal property."

After having delivered herself of this speech, Madame sank down as if exhausted on a sofa, and gazed upon her daughter as if her look would utterly overwhelm her. Still Dora preserved her composure, and pouring out a glass of champagne, handed it to her mother, saying, in a soothing voice,

"Here, mamma, calm yourself and drink this. I will tell you all, and, in the first place, I repeat what I have just told Dr. and Mrs. Grey, that I never have been married."

The Marquise tossed off her glass of wine hastily to give place to the expres-

sion of her indignation as she exclaimed—

“Not married! and you dare stand there before me and tell me that! Ah! do I not know to the contrary, as do these good friends of yours here!” Then, turning to Dr. Grey and myself, she demanded—“Will you oblige me with your testimony? Have you not known my daughter living here with her husband, and calling themselves Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, for the space of more than a year, *dites-moi?*”

Thus adjured, we could only say that we had believed the case was as Madame represented. Then Madame laughed a sort of scornful, contemptuous laugh, as she taunted her daughter with these words,

“Yes, I perceive your meaning well—you had rather proclaim your infamy than lose your money, *n'est-ce pas?* You will protest you are not married because you fear for your fortune. Are you not ashamed? You told Mr. Lawford that you had nothing to say to him when he

called on you yesterday—that you had no revelation to make to him, that you would claim your fortune to-day, and that what you had to say you should reserve for other friends to hear; but you were false in that—you had nothing to say, for we all know that Adolphe Meyer was married to you before he left France.”

CHAPTER VII.

AT this stage of the proceedings, the Marquise paused, as if overcome, and Mr. Lawford poured her out a second glass of champagne, whilst Dora looked quietly on, apparently waiting for her turn to be heard. It certainly seemed that she was as eager to deny the fact of her marriage as her mother was to prove it, and upon the balance hung the sum of fifty thousand pounds. If the daughter could prove herself single, it belonged to her—if married, to her mother.

As soon as Madame de Fleury had handed her empty glass into Mr. Lawford's ready hands, Dora began to speak, saying,

“Now, mamma, if you will do me the

kindness to listen to what I have to say, and also Dr. and Mrs. Grey——”

But here her speech was again interrupted by the opening of the door which led into the bedroom, and from it issued a tall, dark young woman, well but plainly dressed, who advanced to the sofa where sat La Marquise, and making a curtsy, said she hoped she saw Madame well. Madame started, but quickly recovering herself, exclaimed—

“You here, Fanchette! I was not aware that you were in Madame Meyer’s service. Your mother had told me you had an engagement in England.”

“So I have, Madame. I have the pleasure to serve Miss Rivers all the time she has been in England, and—*s’il vous plait, c’est moi*—it is me who have played the part of Mr. Fanshaw.”

Whilst we all stood petrified at this announcement, which we saw at once was perfectly correct, the Marquise, still

clinging, as it were, to a straw, exclaimed in a shrill voice,

“But Adolphe—Adolphe Meyer, the musician—I know he was married the day *she*” (pointing to Dora) “left my house ; it is a fact, and can be proved, and all your arts cannot dissemble the fact of Adolphe’s marriage, though the name of the woman did not transpire. I can prove it was *cette infame*.”

“Pardon, Madame,” again interposed the new-comer. “Adolphe *was* married, as you say, but it was to *me*. I am his wife, and I return to him now *ma chère mistress* has no further need of her poor Fanchette’s services.”

The utter discomfiture and rage of the Marquise on hearing this announcement may be better imagined than described, especially when Mr. Lawford came forward and remarked, looking round upon us all,

“I think Miss Rivers has fairly proved

her case ; it was a strange game to play, but the persuasion of her marriage was so well established that Madame la Marquise saw no cause to come forward until to-day. Madame and Le Marquis hoped to escape the unpleasant remarks and scandal which would have followed an open avowal of the rupture of the marriage contract between the Vicomte de Fleury and Miss Rivers, with her strange flight, so they kept everything quiet, and made no further inquiries till the legal time came for the surrender of Miss Rivers' large fortune ; but, as things are all proved to be, it is still her own, and I can only wish her joy of her inheritance, and hope she will make a good use of it."

With these amicable good wishes, Mr. Lawford withdrew, and so did the enraged and disappointed Marquise, who, without further notice of anyone, swept out of the room, casting a glance of withering displeasure at her daughter, who only

returned it by a kindly gesture, and saying,

“Good-bye, mamma; I hope when you think over things calmly, you will forgive me and meet me again in a happier spirit.”

The door then closed upon the visitors, and there only remained ourselves with Dora and her faithful friend. The first act of Dora was to draw off the wedding-ring she had always worn and hold it out to her friend, saying,

“*Tenez*, take back your precious ring, *ma très chère amie*, may it bring you and Adolphe all the happiness you both deserve—there, let him place it again himself on your finger.”

Then after kissing Madame Meyer (the *ci-devant* Mr. Fanshaw) very affectionately, she came and kissed me also, saying,

“I hope you will forgive our masquerading; we never intended to impose ourselves on anyone, and it was only a chapter

of accidents, beginning with the railway one, that brought us into 'society,'” she said, laughing.

I replied that I hoped she would never regret that circumstance, as I was sure we should always feel indebted to it.

After a little more talk, Dr. Grey bade the two friends farewell, and then Dora and I had a comfortable and confidential chat. Madame Meyer soon withdrew to the inner apartment, and then I asked Dora a few questions about that faithful friend, and she told me of the wonderful love and devotion she had shown to her from the time she was left an ailing, sickly child in her mother's loving charge, and how, being some years older than herself, Fanchette took part in the care of her till, after a time, they were separated, when Fanchette's father, whose name was Shaw, died, and her mother went back to Paris. It appeared that Madame de Fleury had always a regard for the Shaw family, and

continued to see Mrs. Shaw and her daughters settled in Paris, and had wished to take Fanchette as her own maid and companion, but the girl declined, as it was proved she possessed so much musical talent, and such a splendid voice, that she easily obtained a good situation at one of the theatres in Paris, where she had always been known as a girl of most blameless character, and her earnings were devoted to her family. Still the mother (the Rosalie of whom Dora had spoken) was not in any way left destitute; her husband had acted as confidential clerk to Mr. Rivers for many years, and he had left Mr. Shaw an annuity for himself, to be continued to his wife after his death.

It was at the theatre that Fanchette made the acquaintance of Adolphe Meyer, whose family was also known to Mrs. Shaw, and, notwithstanding the girl's want of beauty, he became devotedly attached to her. They had, however, resolved to

wait some little time before they married—till their position in life could be better secured, and it was only with the view of helping poor Dora in her flight, and the better to be enabled to watch over her and his beloved at a distance, that Adolphe urged the hasty marriage.

At the moment they had no idea of the good service it would render Miss Rivers, for it was owing to the entire belief in Dora's marriage that there was no pursuit on the part of her family. It had, however, occurred to Fanchette that, by assuming a masculine attire, she would be better able to assist her escape and guard her beloved young mistress, and no doubt her theatrical tendencies helped both to form the idea, and enabled the girl to carry it out so well for a year and a half.

Dora knew at the end of that time that she should be free to follow her own inclinations, as being of age and entitled to receive her liberal fortune, and also

then she could have the delight of rewarding her faithful friend and her excellent husband. (But I may say, as it came to my knowledge afterwards, that both the Meyers refused every kind of pecuniary reward from Dora Rivers.) Thus the mystery of her strange marriage, as supposed, was solved as well as the reluctance always displayed by "*Mr. Fanshaw*" to enter into any society under such false pretences, and I could most truly testify to his firmness in that particular, and also applaud both the motive and the constancy with which it was carried out.

After a time I ventured to pronounce the name of Middleton, only at first speaking of the family generally, but Dora met my question with perfect candour, saying,

"Do not fear to ask me, dear friend; I know you are thinking of Henry; he is acquainted with all my little story, and—and we are engaged to be married."

That acknowledgment led to further

questioning, as to the when and how it had all come to pass, whilst I recalled to my mind the many uncomfortable feelings which his and her own too evident partiality had given rise to. Dora told me that of course the mutual liking began all unsuspected by both, and that no doubt, as soon as he became aware of the nature of his feelings in regard to herself, it must have caused him the greatest uneasiness and regret, whilst on her part she felt bound to suppress any manifestation of her own, and support the character she had undertaken, and sustain the part of a devoted wife.

“Then,” said I, “how did it all come about that you suddenly dropped it and appeared to him in your own natural, unfettered state of single blessedness?”

Dora smiled.

“I had nothing to do with it, nor can I tell you exactly how it came to pass, but it was all Fanchette’s doing—dear, kind Fanchette! Ah, dear Mrs. Grey, you cannot

imagine the strength and charm of that girl's character, only seeing her in an assumed one ; her brightness and cheerfulness and entire forgetfulness of self are but small parts of what Fanchette is to those who know and appreciate her. No wonder Adolphe adores her as he does ! Ah, do *you* remember Fanchette asking Dr. Grey to inquire for a letter for her ?—Yes ? Well, it was from Adolphe, but he wrote constantly, and so did her dear mother and sister Rosalie.”

“ But about Mr. Middleton ? ” said I.

“ Ah, *revenons à nos moutons !* Well, Fanchette seeing how unhappy he was becoming, and not enduring that anyone should even in ignorance entertain an unworthy feeling for me, took occasion in my absence to enlighten him ; she had always such a quick insight into character, simple and quiet as ‘ Mr. Fanshaw ’ must have appeared to you. She felt intuitively he might be trusted, and never was a

revelation more gratefully received. It was soon after that that you called one particular day when we had been to the gardens after we were engaged. Poor dear Fanchette ! she was delighted—almost overjoyed, and in her excitement she told me she was afraid she had been uttering some *bêtise* to you about Mr. Middleton, for she saw you were annoyed, and then, alas ! how justly and rightly you became still more so when we, the culprits, made our appearance !—how well I understood your displeasure, and yet most kind anxiety for me ! Henry and I had already settled that he should leave Castleford for a time ; he said he knew if he stayed on he should compromise me and endanger my secret. I was very desirous to sustain my *rôle* of married life till I came of age, as I felt sure both my mother and the Marquis would rest content till then if they believed in my marriage and (to them) advantageous misconduct.”

“And now what do you propose doing?”
I asked.

“Well, Fanchette and I leave Castleford to-morrow—dear Castleford! I have been very happy here! How could I have supposed it, when poor Fanchette and I took up our desolate abode here to play the part of Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw? I chose that name in deference to her and my dear foster-mother; it seemed we had a right to it, for *mon amie* was actually by name Fan Shaw, so I shared it with her, and hardly doubted that we had every right to the appellation.”

“And where do you intend to go now?”

“Oh, to London. I must go through certain forms and ceremonies on being installed in my rights as an heiress. I shall take up my abode with my good friends the Meyers; he has an excellent engagement at Exeter Hall, and hopes, indeed fully expects, to get one for Fanchette, so that they may sing together.

How I shall delight in seeing their happiness !”

“ And as to your own ?”

“ Well, I hope I am on the road to it. I am to see Henry this evening and tell him the result of my interview with Mr. Lawford ; that with my mother was an unexpected pleasure, not duly appreciated, I fear ; but, nevertheless, I am glad it took place, and in your presence, as it set the identity of Fanchette with Mr. Fanshaw at rest for ever. Then Henry is to tell his father everything, and after that join me in London ; and all things being propitious, we hope to be married in a month or two, and then take our departure for the Continent. As for what may follow, that is for the Fates to decide.”

And it appeared that the Fates, or something else more to be trusted, did decide very favourably in the case. Everything turned out as could be best desired. Mr. Middleton (*père*), on making every

needful inquiry, was perfectly satisfied with the choice his son had made of a very charming wife. The two Miss Middletons accompanied him to London, and were present at the marriage of Henry Middleton and Dora Rivers.

The newly married pair went abroad, and remained two or three years. When they returned to live in Castleford, no one in the place, except the Middleton family and ourselves, knew the identity of Mrs. Henry Middleton and the lady they had known as Mrs. Fanshaw. In fact, so few people had been acquainted with the *soi-disant* "Fanshaws," that they hardly remarked on the resemblance they might have traced. Some few of the more observant ones who did so, accounted for the fact by the supposition that it was the likeness which first bespoke Henry Middleton's attention and liking for Miss Rivers. All that was known of the lady he married was that she was a Miss Rivers, of good

family, and large fortune, and it was further conjectured that he met with her on his travels when abroad. I only know that Dora is now greatly admired and esteemed by all who know her.

One word for the Meyers, who have made their mark in the musical world, and are doing as well as they deserve. They occasionally come from London and spend a few days with the Middletons, and at these times there are generally charming musical parties; but I do not think that anyone suspects, when they are listening with such delight to one of Mrs. Henry Middleton's and Madame Meyer's exquisite duets, that they are applauding Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw!

THE OLD INN.

THE OLD INN.

CHAPTER I.

ON the outskirts of the town of Castleford stands a picturesque house, known now as "The Old Inn." It is no longer an inn, though I remember it well as such in years gone by, and then it was called the "Castle Inn." It was situated on a wild stretch of common or moor, and in the background rose a chain of hills, on the most conspicuous of which stood the old Castle, which, with the ford or river running near its base, gave its name to our ancient town. This Castle was little more than a ruin in those days, and it was

said to be of great antiquity. About a century or so before the time of which I speak, one of its lords chose to convert the most habitable part of one of its remaining square towers into a sort of shooting box; and as there were grouse on the wild moors adjoining, it pleased some of the noble family to whom the domain belonged to come there occasionally, and vary their sport in Scotland by visiting Castleford during the month of August.

As Lord Ashford, the proprietor, came generally accompanied by several other gentlemen, there was but little accommodation for them in the ruined Castle, as the restored part barely sufficed for the limited number for whom it was originally designed. It was on these occasions that the "Castle Inn" had the honour of entertaining the surplus number of Lord Ashford's guests.

It was a fine roomy rambling old house, with old-fashioned extensive gardens and

grounds in the rear, and the stream which almost surrounded the house widened into an old-fashioned fish-pond of some width on one side. I believe in times long past the Inn had been a manor-house of some consideration, for its various gable ends, of which there were some four or five, were quaintly adorned with coats of arms and other heraldic devices. In fact I think the "Old Inn" must have been, in its best days, a far more desirable dwelling than the gloomy Castle (which stood frowning on the hills just above) could ever have been in its most prosperous state.

Old Mark Lawson, who owned the "Castle Inn" in my time, and whose forefathers had done so long before, was very proud of his old house, and not less so of his guests, when any of his former landlord's family found it convenient to make use of the Inn to accommodate some of their shooting companions. Good Mrs. Lawson, too, in her quiet way, was not

insensible to the honour and glory of these visits. They were somewhat like "angel appearances," being few and far between, and that perhaps added to the estimation in which they were held by these good people.

Lord Ashford rarely stayed above a fortnight when he did come, and it was always on his way to Scotland (our town of Castleford being situated in the northern part of Yorkshire), and for some years he had never appeared at the Castle at all.

Mark Lawson often lamented that the castle seemed to have gone out of fashion, it was so long since he had entertained any of his lordship's family and friends at his "place," as he called the "Castle Inn." The old man was very "well to do" in the world; he was a substantial farmer as well as inn-keeper. There was nothing of the public-house about the "Castle Inn;" no drinking went on amongst the lower orders. Mr. Lawson kept good horses for posting during the days when such

requirements were in fashion, but neither he nor his wife would tolerate anything that could detract from the fame of the "Castle Inn" as a first-class house of its description.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawson had married late in life ; they were both old-fashioned, middle-aged people then—she somewhere about forty, whilst her husband numbered some fifty or more years—and were greatly delighted when their union was blessed with two children, a son and a daughter. As people possessing ample means for their position in life, they were able and willing to give both these young people every possible advantage of education that was considered necessary in their estimation. Lucy, the daughter, became a pupil of the Miss Primroses, whilst Lambert, the son, was brought up as a scholar and boarder at the grammar-school. Lucy was a quiet, somewhat prosaic little creature, rather pretty, but promising to

become like the mother in face and figure as she grew nearer to her in age. I believe that Mrs. Lawson had been a good-looking, comely woman in her youth and middle age, but her increasing rotundity of face and figure had nearly obliterated the traces when I first knew her. Still there was something very likeable about the good woman's homely appearance, and I am sure her husband thought that his daughter could not do better than resemble her mother in all points, and certain it is that Lucy inherited much of her mother's good temper and pleasant, comfortable ways, as well as her round face and bright complexion.

Mrs. Lawson had been a good daughter to a tyrannical old father who would never hear of her marriage during his lifetime, and at his death left nearly all his money to a married daughter and son, whom he had cared little about in his lifetime, for fear, he declared, that his Patty should fall a prey to some fortune-hunter after he

was dead and gone. It was lucky, therefore, for Patty Lambert, when her father, the old Exciseman, left her thus bereft of friends and home, that Mark Lawson's long attachment proved equal to the occasion, and that he loved his portionless Patty for what she was and not for what she had, or was expected to have. Mrs. Lawson never reverted to the circumstance except to remark,

“Father did what he thought best for me; he knew, if Mark really loved me, he wanted no money with me—he had enough of his own, so father did right in leaving it to those who he knew wanted it most.”

And there the matter ended, as far as she was concerned, and it never gave her a moment's uneasiness that Mark Lawson had taken her for herself alone.

It was indeed a charming home to which he brought the bright, buxom little woman he had loved and courted for more than twenty years. Such a change as it was

from the dingy old house in one of the narrow streets in Castleford, where old Lambert had lived in a somewhat miserly fashion, enjoying the reputation of the riches he was hoarding up instead of spending. Mr. Lawson was too glad to get his wife at last even to owe the old Exciseman any grudge for the shabby way in which he had treated the most patient and dutiful of daughters. He even willingly acceded to his wife's proposition of calling her first child after its deceased grandfather; he only added a mental reservation that he hoped it would be the only thing in which his son should take after old Lambert, but at such a time there were few things Mark would have denied to the new-made happy mother of his boy.

Two years after, Lucy made her appearance at the "Castle Inn," and after that event the family of Lawson received no further additions.

The objectionable name of Lambert (so commemorative of the old Exciseman) was speedily lost and merged in that of "Bertie," by which young Lawson was always known both by friends and acquaintances. There was certainly nothing to remind anyone of the boy's maternal grandfather, neither was there much trace of his descent from his own father or mother. By one of those strange anomalies of nature we sometimes see, from his earliest childhood Bertie Lawson appeared as if he belonged to a different sphere of life from that occupied by his nearest relations, whilst the girl Lucy "*favoured*," as the country people expressed it, both her father, and especially her mother, in face and figure, but was, notwithstanding, a pretty, innocent-looking girl, fair, fresh, and sweet-tempered.

Bertie seemed cast in quite a different mould both as regarded mind and body. Perhaps there was something of old Mark

Lawson's determination of purpose and strength of character in the expression of his handsome dark eyes, and the firmness of his well-shaped mouth and chin. He was a beautiful child, but self-willed and difficult to manage, and as he grew older sometimes not too scrupulous as to the means he employed for anything tending to his own gratification; and as he advanced to man's estate, these unamiable traits of character rather strengthened than softened. Like most men brought up with an only sister (who always gave up her own way to accommodate herself to his wishes), he was selfish. His mother worshipped him, and his father silently in his own mind bowed down to the imagined superiority of his son.

The elder man was fairly educated for his line of life, but Bertie's acquirements soared infinitely beyond his father's; he was fond of desultory reading, and he had every opportunity for gratifying his taste

that his father's money could command. He had an artistic eye and a taste for drawing, and was also gifted with a fine voice and a musical ear, and as this latter accomplishment was shared also by Lucy, the brother and sister were fond of exercising it, and played and sang together with much natural taste and talent.

I have said that Lucy was educated at the Miss Primroses' "Establishment for Young Ladies." It was rather an infringement of the rules laid down by these good ladies (in order to preserve the select character of their school) when they received the inn-keeper's daughter as one of their boarders. They refused, as a general rule, to admit the daughters of the tradespeople of Castleford, but they made an exception—I cannot tell why—in regard to Lucy. They declared that Mr. Lawson was no common inn-keeper—that he possessed much land of his own, that he could give up his inn any day he pleased;

he was known to be rich, and Lucy was an only daughter, therefore she ought, under such circumstances, to have the best education her father could afford to give her. So it ended in Lucy's being sent, when she was twelve years old, for four years to be educated and polished up at the Miss Primroses'. She was a nice, natural little creature, ready to talk of the Inn and the beautiful garden and the wild moors all round without a suspicion that she, as the inn-keeper's daughter, was not on a par of social equality with Miss Maltby, the rich brewer's daughter, or Miss Scrivener, whose father was head clerk in Mr. Middleton's bank. Lucy had seen nothing but the fair and pleasant side of inn-keeping; there was nothing of the lower element and common kind ever permitted to intrude itself within the doors of Mark Lawson's "Castle Inn." Mrs. Lawson herself rarely appeared in public, though she was always ready to welcome any lady

guests that might come for a pleasant change to her nicely appointed house, and never failed to superintend all domestic arrangements both in kitchen and parlours, though mainly conducted by superior servants in all departments.

When Mr. Lawson brought his middle-aged wife home, he said she had had enough of drudgery all her early life, and he wanted a companion and not a head servant, so he installed her in the prettiest sitting-room in the house, which opened on to the garden, and it was there that all Lucy's early years were passed.

When the Castle guests had last occupied rooms in the quiet Inn, Lucy was quite a child, yet she observed her mother was rather excited with the honour, and made much more extensive preparations for them than for their ordinary guests. But in justice to the good inn-keeper and his wife, it was not so much the vulgar deference to rank and station that

prompted the obvious desire to please Lord Ashford and his friends above all others, it proceeded more from a certain loyal feeling of long past feudal attachment that in Mark Lawson's case had survived the general wreck of such a sentiment in this county, but the Lawsons had lived under the Earl of Ashford for more generations than he could well number up. They had always been on the best of terms as tenant and landlord, and when Mark Lawson's father became an independent man and bought his occupation, and Inn included, from a former spendthrift earl, he never forgot the old relations between the families in past generations, but delighted to do honour to all who came in the ancient name of Ashford; and when Mark in his turn succeeded to his father's property, he inherited all his sentiments of veneration as well for the Earls of Ashford and their descendants.

CHAPTER II.

WITH all these feelings still in full force, it may be imagined with what gratification Mr. and Mrs. Lawson received an intimation from Lord Ashford that, after so many years of absence, some of his family proposed visiting the old place again, and would, if it suited Mr. and Mrs. Lawson to receive them, make their house their head-quarters whilst in that neighbourhood.

Lord Ashford went on to explain that neither he nor his eldest son would be of the party—they were going direct into Scotland, paying a visit by the way. His second son, Mr. Lionel Elmsley, and two daughters, wished to spend a week or two

at Castleford, having heard so much of the picturesque old Castle and the country around. They would then proceed on their journey to Scotland, and join the Earl at his own place in Inverness.

My school friend, Lucy, came down to me breathless with these tidings. I had befriended her on her first arrival at the Miss Primroses' school, where I was then a great girl, and on the point of leaving, and she a little timid creature, just entering on her new world, but happily ignorant of the many troubles which she might encounter, in consequence of her father's calling in life.

As the Rector's daughter, and much older than most of the young ladies in the school, I was happily able to afford the new-comer that protection and assistance she so greatly needed; and even after I left I was able to keep a friendly watch over my little favourite. So it may be supposed a lively friendship was the natural

result. Nor was it diminished when Lucy went home to live, and I became the wife of Dr. Grey.

At the time of which I speak Lucy was about one and twenty. She had been living at home for some years, and was, to the great comfort of her parents, still likely to remain with them. Poor Lucy had had a little romance in her life, and a great sorrow. She had formed an attachment, the year after she left school, to a young man in a regiment bound for India; he was rather above her in station, but not in education, and his parents, a poor curate and his wife, had been much pleased with Lucy, and sanctioned their engagement, only stipulating that, as they were both so young, they were not to think of marriage until their son's return. That return never took place, the young man died soon after he reached India, and poor Lucy was for a time quite heart-broken. Happily she was of too cheery a nature to succumb

to her grief, and the acquaintance had been a very short one. So in time her sorrow softened, and at last gently passed away, and Lucy became, if not quite as merry, at least as cheerful as ever. I believe Mrs. Lawson looked upon it as a special Providence that had removed Lucy's lover, and left her to the tender care of her loving parents. She said to me on one occasion,

"I never like to say it to Lucy, Mrs. Grey, but I am sure she is much better off as she is than tramping after a regiment, with perhaps a lot of children, and her husband having nothing ever to look to but his pay—and he only a poor lieutenant."

"You forget the love part of the business, Mrs. Lawson," I took the liberty of remarking.

"No, indeed, I don't, Mrs. Grey. I know what love is, and what it isn't. My Mark showed more love for me when he

left me for twenty years to nurse poor father than if he'd been ever so impatient, and made me leave him to come and enjoy myself (which I never should have done) here, and him pining all by himself. So my opinion is that Lucy is best for the present with her father and mother."

"Ah, but you know the general law is that man and woman shall leave father and mother, and cleave to husband or wife, as the case may be."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Grey; no doubt it is a very good rule—for you, too, who have gone and been and done it—but, for my part, I prefer the exception, which they say proves the rule, and I am more glad than I can tell you to keep our Lucy, and so is her father, good man, and it seems to me as if it were a right-down act of Providence to keep her at home with us."

Lucy had certainly a very happy home to remain in, and she knew it, and tried

to make everyone happy that came within its cheerful precincts. But the day she came to me with the news of their expected guests she seemed rather downcast. I therefore remarked—

“But *you* need have nothing to do with these great ladies, Lucy; they will only be taking rooms in your father's house for a week or two, and you never do go near any of the visitors who come in that way.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, “but these great people seem different in my father's estimation from the every-day people he is accustomed to entertain in his house. He has ordered my piano to be placed in their sitting-room, and all my nicest books and little knick-knacks, so I shall lose my usual amusements whilst they choose to remain. I do not know what Bertie will say to giving up our evening singing practice together,” and Lucy sighed at the thought.

I asked Lucy if she knew how old the two girls were who were coming to them,

and whether the brother was a man or a boy.

“Something between both,” said Lucy, smiling. “Bertie has been consulting the ‘Peerage,’ and finds the Honourable Lionel Elmsley is about eighteen. His two sisters—the ones who are coming—are, the one Lady Margaret, a child of eleven or twelve, and her sister, Lady Helena, about nineteen or twenty ; so I hope, as they are all so young, they will not be very difficult to please.”

I echoed Lucy’s wish, and then she told me they were only to bring one maid with them—a woman who had been Lady Margaret’s nurse, and came originally from Castleford, as Lady Ashford had engaged her when she had accompanied her husband to the old Castle some ten years back. Lady Ashford had died the following year, and that was said to be the reason her lord had never been there since. This nurse, Mrs. Norris, had remained in

charge of the youthful Lady Margaret, and no doubt it was from her that the girls had imbibed their wish to see a place they had heard so much of as the old ruined Castle of Castleford.

Of course, as the rumour of the expected guests at the "Castle Inn" spread abroad in our little community, there was much talk and some small speculation on the subject. People wondered what the eldest girl would be like, and how she would be dressed, and supposed they should be able to gratify their curiosity in respect to all the party on Sunday, when no doubt they would attend the principal church (which was at that time my father's). Some good people went the length of thinking it very strange that Lord Ashford should send such a young party without a chaperon to an Inn, instead of to their own Castle close by. Then it was suggested (which was the true state of the case) that as there were no regular servants at the Castle,

only an old keeper and his wife, it would save much trouble and expense for the young ladies to stay at the pleasant Inn, which was well known to Lord Ashford, and with people whom he could so entirely trust as Mr. and Mrs. Lawson for their host and hostess. It further transpired, in the course of time, that Lord Ashford was by no means a rich man for his position in life, and that after he gave up his London house, hired for the season, he was in the habit of going North with his family till the Autumn was far advanced, when the whole party generally migrated to a warmer climate for the Winter, his own ancestral place in the south of England being let for a term of years. On the present occasion his lordship was making a tour of visits in Scotland, accompanied by his two elder daughters, the ladies Katherine and Rosamond, and his eldest son, Lord Elmsley.

As the younger girls and their brother,

who was just leaving Harrow, were not included in the invitations, there seemed no reason why they should not spend a week or two (according to their fancy) at the quiet pleasant Inn at Castleford, with Nurse Norris to look after them. The two fine ladies-maids were bespoken by the sisters, who required their services on their various visits; and as for the youth Lionel, he was bent on grouse shooting and every sort of outdoor amusement he could find, and did not care to borrow his father's valet, or any such personage, as his assistant in these pastimes; he trusted to finding a country born and bred fag, that would answer all his purposes. No doubt the young man, hearing that "mine host" had a son, believed he should find in him a vassal suited and devoted to his service. He did so; but the Harrow schoolboy had little calculated on the very superior sort of person he was fated to find in the old inn-keeper's only son!

I must observe here that in spite of his personal advantages, which were great, and his cleverness and various accomplishments, Bertie Lawson was by no means a general favourite in Castleford. The young man was above his own rank of life, and he took no pains to conceal the sort of contempt he entertained for the young men who naturally considered themselves his equals. In fact, Bertie never associated intimately with any of them. Of course this avoidance was set down to pride—and that of the lowest sort, purse pride—by the youths who had been his companions at the grammar school, because, as they said, his father was so rich; but I think it was high self-esteem more than any thought of money which caused young Lawson's reluctance to seek associates amongst the middle classes at Castleford.

There was, however, one house at which he had always been on very intimate terms ever since he was a boy at school,

and that was the house of a Mr. Young, who was the second master in the school. He was a retiring, studious man, a widower with a family of daughters.

The Miss Youngs were nearly all handsome girls, and the two elder ones had married well. There were still two at home, and to the youngest of the two, Alice, Bertie Lawson was supposed to be deeply attached. I say *supposed*, because there was no open engagement, if any understanding existed between the young people. Perhaps Bertie hesitated, fearing Mr. Young might not look favourably on an inn-keeper's son as his own son-in-law—his other two daughters had married professional men—one a clergyman, the other a surgeon—but there is little doubt Mr. Young regarded Bertie Lawson with no common interest and liking; whilst it was matter of notoriety that Alice Young's whole heart and soul were devoted to Bertie Lawson.

She was a beautiful girl, far more regularly handsome than her married sisters, clever and high-spirited. She did not scruple to express her own opinions on the subject of Mark Lawson's calling, when reminded that the old man and his forefathers had kept an inn for many generations.

“Well, and what of that? I am sure the ‘Castle Inn’ is a much nicer and prettier place than the house I have lived in ever since I was born, and it is for his own pleasure that Mr. Lawson keeps it going as an inn; he is rich enough to give it up any day, not that any amount of money could make Bertie Lawson more a gentleman than he is already; and as for talent, why, my father says he knows pretty nearly all that he is able to teach him, and any girl, let her be who she may, might be proud of his preference.”

Such were Miss Young's sentiments, and there is no doubt they were to a certain

extent reciprocated. But Bertie Lawson was a cautious man, and though he loved Alice, he seemed in no haste to bind himself so early in life to any irrevocable engagement. The time could not be very far distant when he would become the master of the old Inn, and when that came to pass everyone said it would be known as an inn no longer.

CHAPTER III.

ALL Castleford heard of the safe arrival of the expected travellers at the old Inn at the appointed time. Various were the sources from which the interesting tidings emanated—all proving to be correct as to the main fact.

It was somewhere in the middle of the second week in August that these young scions of the ancient house of Ashford came into our neighbourhood. Nothing more, however, was seen or heard of them till the following Sunday, when, according to expectation, they made their appearance at church. The two young ladies and their brother were duly conducted to the spacious and long unoccupied pew belonging to

the old Castle. It was situated at the end of one of the aisles, very near the pulpit and reading-desk (which was of the ancient "three decker" construction), and being slightly raised above the surrounding seats, the occupants of the pew were fully exposed to public view, unless they chose to draw the curtain which stretched from one end of the pew to the other.

The young people, however, took no such means of withdrawing from their fellow-worshippers' gaze, so those who pleased had ample time and opportunity for inspection of the new-comers. The young man came first, a boyish-looking youth, but well grown, with a fair, frank face and bright, intelligent eyes, which seemed more occupied in scanning the congregation than in attending to the pastor's exhortations. The two girls were utterly unlike, the younger one resembling her brother, only with more delicate features and somewhat fragile-looking form—

a very pretty child altogether, simply but prettily dressed, and with a high-bred look that spoke of the ancient race she belonged to. The elder sister, Lady Helena, was altogether different; she was dark, plain, and under-sized, and without any single personal recommendation—unless it existed in a certain air of race which I fancied I discerned in her quiet, lady-like appearance; at least, such was the impression produced on my mind as I furtively gazed in the direction of the Castle pew. It had been empty since the time when, some ten years back, the mother of these two girls had, I remembered, appeared there in her graceful but fading beauty.

I had never been acquainted with any of the Ashford family, nor had any of my friends had that honour, for their stay at the old Castle was for the purpose of sport, and the short duration of these visits had precluded any intercourse between the Castle and the few families of

the neighbourhood who might have sought an introduction.

On the only occasion when Lady Ashford accompanied her husband to the Castle, it appeared she was in very delicate health, and went nowhere except once or twice to church, when, as a girl just grown up, I was so fascinated with her delicate beauty. She was then failing and fading away rapidly, but I believe almost imperceptibly to those who saw her every day, yet I remember that I noticed the anxious look that Lord Ashford occasionally bent on the lovely lady beside him when she slightly coughed, and pronounced them in my thoughts "a charming couple." Lord Ashford was not handsome, but a fine-looking man, with an air *distingué*, and very dark, both as to hair and complexion. It seemed to me, as I looked at the Lady Helena, that she was (if I may use the expression) a stunted likeness of her father; her features were much plainer,

still there was a strong family likeness. I had never seen any of the children before, and I do not think any of them, except the then baby, Lady Margaret, accompanied their parents on their visit to Castleford.

As we passed out of the church, heated by an August sun and a large congregation, into the sweet, fresh air, I found myself near my friend Lucy, and as she walked part of the way home by my side, I observed,

“I see your new inmates are arrived ; I hope you find them pleasant ?”

Lucy laughed as she replied,

“I hope they find *us* so, which is more to the purpose—that is, I hope that the young ladies and their brother are comfortable in our house. I have not seen them myself as yet ; to-day at church is the first opportunity I have had of observing what they really are like, and I am disappointed to find Lady Helena so plain, but the little

girl is very pretty, and the brother a nice-looking lad."

"I wonder you have not had the opportunity of making your present observations before—of people who have been in your house the last two or three days, I suppose?"

"Ah!" said Lucy, in reply, "but you must remember, dear Mrs. Grey, not as guests, but as lodgers, and I have nothing to do with them, and am so fearful of seeming to intrude that I always go up to my room by another staircase than that they use. However, I have made the acquaintance of the nurse, Mrs. Norris; my mother knew her in former days, and was, I believe, the person by whose recommendation the late Lady Ashford engaged her, when she was suddenly obliged to part with the nurse who came with her to the Castle. She seems now a person of much importance in the family, and she settles everything for the young ladies in

our house, and seems very much attached to the whole family."

Then Lucy told me how her father and mother had received the young people on their arrival, to see they had everything they wanted, but after that Mrs. Norris was the person who gave the daily orders, so that it had not been necessary for Mr. and Mrs. Lawson to appear again.

"And your brother—has not Mr. Bertie made acquaintance with the young gentleman? I should think Mr. Elmsley would find him a most valuable acquisition in this part of the world, both in the matter of sport as well as occasional companionship."

I said I knew that Bertie Lawson was a first-rate shot, for his father owned a large tract of moorland, besides the extensive farm which lay beyond the hills; he was also the best cricketer in the county, and in the Winter months, when hunting was the sport, everyone said no

one rode so straight to hounds as Bertie Lawson, or was better mounted—indeed, it had been Mark Lawson's pride before him to ride the best horse with the D—— hounds that money could procure. The old man's hunting days were ended, but there was nothing he enjoyed so much as going over every inch of the well-known ground with Bertie after a hard day's run. Lucy told me, with a little quiet smile, that Mr. Elmsley had inquired after her brother, and that he had been from home all that week, but he was expected back the next day, and no doubt he would be happy to accompany Mr. Elmsley sometimes, if he wished it.

“But you know, dear Mrs. Grey, Bertie is not to be depended on for going any one's way but his own; so if he does not fancy the young man, he will make some excuse and be off again.”

I understood very well what Lucy meant, for there never existed a more in-

dependent young Yorkshireman (and that is saying a great deal) than the old inn-keeper's son. Bertie did not inherit his father's loyal love for the old house and family of Ashford; he was more inclined to assert his own father's importance as a considerable landholder himself, and I knew the idea of the Inn, though carried on in so unique a form as it was (and so little, if at all, profitable on that account), was gall and wormwood to the aspiring young man.

Bertie could not help feeling his own superiority to the station of life in which he was born, and which both his parents had so satisfactorily filled before him. Unhappily Bertie was eminently self-centred; he was the beginning and end of his own little world. He longed inexpressibly to soar into a higher and more congenial atmosphere. I felt sure he would only associate with the young Elmsley on terms of recognized equality. He would have

said, "Equality of all that distinguishes a man, as a noble and intellectual creature."

He had no doubt purposely absented himself when the Earl's family arrived, that there might be no question of his being called upon to greet their coming as the landlord's son. He wished to appear before them on his own merits, if he saw fit to appear at all, and I could not help conjecturing how he would manage to reconcile the difficulties of the situation. Of course I had no opportunity of judging for myself at that time, and it was only through Lucy that I heard anything of the young people at the inn during the early part of their sojourn there.

She told me, when the young ladies heard, through Mrs. Norris, that they were monopolizing Miss Lawson's piano, Lady Margaret came, with all a child's eagerness, running before Mrs. Norris to the room where Lucy was sitting, either working or

reading, and without waiting for an introduction, exclaimed,

“It was very good of you, Miss Lawson, to lend us your piano. Helena and I are ashamed of keeping it away from you ; but pray come and play on it in our room, we are both very fond of music, and I dare-say you are also. Now please do come at once.”

Lucy made some civil reply, but declined the invitation, which was given only by the younger sister, though Mrs. Norris assured Lucy that Lady Helena would be very glad to hear her play, but she did not like to intrude upon her. So Lucy stayed where she was, and her piano remained also in the possession of the Ladies Elmsley.

Young Lionel Elmsley was, however, more fortunate in his advances to Bertie Lawson. It seems he had heard something of the fame of his acquirements from Nurse Norris, who retailed all she heard

and saw for the benefit of her young people, and going about amongst old friends and acquaintances in Castleford, heard them all speak of the inn-keeper's son as being such a genius in the way of "book learning," besides being considered the best shot and rider in all that side of the country. The latter acquirements were all that it concerned the young man to know. He saw Bertie, and was much pleased with his appearance and address. There was a native refinement at that time about the inn-keeper's son, that seemed innate in him, as no one could divine from whence he had acquired it. But I believe that nice taste, with perception of the fitness of things, is as much a natural gift as an ear for music, or an eye and hand for painting, or, still more, an imagination for poetry or prose.

Bertie was very quiet, very self-possessed, never frightened or flurried by any person or event, and when introduced by Lionel Elmsley, he stood in the presence

of the two young ladies, Helena and Margaret, with perfect respect, yet as much at ease as in that of Alice Young, or other girls of her standing and class.

Lionel Elmsley was perfectly natural and high-spirited, without a notion of self-importance, ready to take part and be amused with anything pleasant that came in his way ; indeed, as the third son of an impoverished Earl, his estimation of himself was placed at a very low figure, and might have been summed up in the word "detrimental." As such, he never dreamt of standing on any notion of self-importance, and would have honestly confessed that he considered the inn-keeper's son, standing on his own merits and appearance, "a better man than himself." He did not, perhaps, tell Bertie so, as such an admission might have proved the existence of a previous doubt.

Lionel Elmsley possessed all the generosity and liberality of mind and sentiment

which nature and gentle birth, with thorough training in a first-rate public school, could bestow. He was sincerely charmed with young Lawson; he did not disdain to make him a constant companion in all his outdoor amusements; besides that, Bertie had large possessions in the way of guns, fishing-tackle, and a thorough good horse or two; these Lionel was contented to make use of, as much to his own satisfaction as their owner's. Never, in fact, had Lionel had such unlimited power over things so entirely to his taste; he came off, as he said, *third* best at home, his elder brothers having the first choice of all things pleasant and useful. So happy was he that he wrote a glowing description of his enjoyment to the Earl, with a petition that he and his sisters might prolong their visit to the Inn at Castleford, whilst his father and sisters continued their round of engagements.

Lord Ashford was very willing to give

the desired leave, but being a prudent man (the natural sequence of his father having been a spendthrift), he first requested Mr. Lawson to be good enough to let him know at what rate his young people were living and enjoying themselves so much in his Inn, resolving to shape his answer to his son's petition accordingly. Old Lawson would willingly have entertained the welcome party without any remuneration, but that, he knew, would not suit the Earl's ideas. He therefore put everything at the lowest possible figure, telling Lord Ashford that living was so cheap in their quiet part of the world, and making it appear that he charged just the right price for board and lodging—neither more nor less.

The inn-keeper's bill was equally surprising and satisfactory. There were no other charges for horses, &c., &c., and when these things were mentioned by Lord Ashford, the answer was that he, Mark

Lawson, considered himself still the representative of his lordship's oldest ancestral tenants. He therefore hoped, in recognition of that tie, to be allowed in his small way to minister to the amusement and gratification of his lordship's family whilst frequenting the old place. The Earl smiled at this loyal address, but granted his children's petition.

CHAPTER IV.

I HAVE hardly mentioned the Lady Helena Elmsley as yet, although my story has more to do with her than the others of her family. For the first two or three weeks of her stay at the "Castle Inn" I saw but little of her (and that was only at church), and heard still less. Lucy told me that Lady Helena kept more aloof from all chance communication with the residents in the house than either her brother or young sister; as to the latter, she was frequently to be seen as well as heard. Lady Margaret became very fond of running into Lucy's sitting-room, chatting with her in her pretty careless, child-like way, looking over her books and drawings, the

latter for the most part the work of Bertie Lawson. Young Elmsley would often also present himself in Lucy's room, but with more ceremony than his little sister—coming sometimes in search of Bertie, and at other times to wile away an unoccupied hour or two, but never once had the Lady Helena crossed the threshold of that pretty apartment. If they chanced to meet, Lucy said, a hurried bow of recognition was all that ever passed between them.

Bertie had once been taken by Lionel into his sister's room, possibly for the gratification of the young ladies' curiosity respecting the all-accomplished inn-keeper's son, whose praises were so often sung by their brother; the intercourse between the young men was entirely confined to their outdoor pursuits and companionship.

On the occasion mentioned, Lionel asked Bertie into the room, jointly occupied by himself and sisters, under a pretence of

showing him some sketches, roughly executed by himself, of his father's place in Scotland. Bertie Lawson bore the ordeal with quiet self-possession; he acknowledged the murmured greeting of "Pray come in, Mr. Lawson, and look at my brother's drawings!" of the elder of the two of the high-born young ladies with respectful ease, and smiled in answer to the little Margaret's more familiar exclamation, "Do tell us please, Mr. Lawson, what you think of Leo's sketches!—I have seen some of yours in Miss Lawson's room, and I thought them beautiful! and I draw a little myself, but I am not much of a judge, though I am sure you are."

Bertie gave his opinion very candidly on the merits of the drawings submitted to his consideration; he disclaimed anything approaching connoisseurship on his own part, though he admitted he was passionately fond of the Art, and would have liked to have cultivated it with the

view to future occupation, only he felt it would interfere with other pursuits which he should not like to relinquish.

"I should hope not," said young Elmsley. "Drawing is all very well in its way, and it's a great help to one in many others, and it's no end of a *ressource* on a rainy day, as I have found in touching up my sketches, but it would be a pity for you, who do so many things better than most of us, to give up everything for one pursuit. Now please give me a hint or two as to my faults, and also to my merits, if you can discern any."

Bertie's quick eye was not slow in discerning both, and gave the young man the benefit both of his opinion and advice very modestly offered. The two girls came forward to hear what was said, forgetting, for the time being, that they were listening to the inn-keeper's son. Lady Helena proffered a few remarks and paid some attention to Bertie's observations, whilst

Lady Margaret took the chief burden of the conversation on herself with her lively and pertinent little remarks, ending in a bold request that Mr. Lawson would just draw something for her scrap-book.

That one visit, though apparently so pleasant to all the young people, was never repeated. Lionel probably recollected that, although young Lawson was in every way so superior to his station in life, and a perfectly unobjectionable companion for himself, especially in that out-of-the-way place, yet he might not altogether be considered an eligible acquaintance for his young sisters. Therefore, as their ostensible guardian and protector, Lionel came to the conclusion that he must be contented with reserving the pleasure of Bertie Lawson's society to himself, and also to the outdoor enjoyment of the same.

The way in which, shortly after that time, I became acquainted with the young

Elmsleys was simply this. It happened that an intimate friend and neighbour of Dr. Grey's had, on leaving home for a year or two, given him the option of shooting over his moors, which adjoined those of Lord Ashford (having indeed formed part of the property parted with by the spendthrift Earl, his father). The shooting there was not particularly good, as the birds were wild, and never very numerous, so it was seldom that Dr. Grey found time or inclination to profit by his friend's permission. Bertie Lawson knew this was the case, and it induced him to call on my husband one morning, to ask his leave for Mr. Elmsley to go over these moors, accompanied by himself; he thought it would vary the sport a little for the young man, and be a pleasant extension of their liberty. Dr. Grey did not hesitate to give the desired permission, feeling sure his friend would be glad to oblige a son of Lord Ashford's.

The time was drawing near for the departure of Mr. Elmsley, with his sisters, and Bertie said he was very desirous of showing him a little better sport before he left the county. It seems this idea carried out resulted in a success, as the birds, not having been before disturbed, were found in greater number than usual. It was in consequence of this that Mr. Lionel Elmsley called soon after, to thank Dr. Grey for the day's sport he had enjoyed.

We both liked the young man, and he made himself very pleasant, with plenty to say, and as it began to rain during the time of his visit, we pressed him to stay to luncheon, and, apparently nothing loth, he consented. Whilst we were waiting its announcement, Dr. Grey, for his guest's amusement, produced a valuable collection of ancient coins, and found an eager and interested examiner in the young man. After he had looked at them for some time,

he observed, as we were going into the dining-room,

“You have given me a great treat, for though I really have but a very limited acquaintance with such ancient coins, I am fond of seeing them, and these are such a splendid lot. But my sister, Lady Helena, is a collector in a small way, and would be charmed to look over such a fine collection. Would you allow me to bring her one day?”

Of course there could be but one reply to this request, and I liked the brother so much that I was glad to embrace the proposed opportunity of making the acquaintance of the sisters. The next day was to be devoted to the new moor, but the following one was fixed for the meeting and introduction.

Mr. Elmsley drove his sisters over in a pony-carriage, with a pretty pair of ponies, which I knew to be Lucy's exclusive possession, her father having made her the

present soon after her time of trouble, in the hope that she might be induced to make the exertion of driving her mother out, and reap the benefit of so doing herself.

Now all poor Lucy's pleasant things seemed to have passed, for the time being, into the possession of these young people, who appropriated all their advantages very naturally, without much thought of the lender or of the kindness that was so ready to contribute to their amusement.

Lionel Elmsley had a very pleasant, winning manner, and he seemed already almost an old acquaintance, and as such introduced his two sisters, who met Dr. Grey and myself with more distant courtesy. At least I speak of the grown-up sister, Lady Helena. I was not particularly prepossessed either by her manner or looks. I found she was even plainer than I had imagined, in my cursory view at church. Her manners were very reserved

—seemingly more from natural coldness than from any intentional hauteur. It was difficult at first to get on with her, but my husband possessed to perfection the art of drawing people out of themselves, and making them easy and natural.

After a time Lady Helena thawed a little, and when the coins, the object of the visit, were brought to view, she became really interested, and showed a great appreciation of their respective merits. So did not Lady Margaret, but she found other amusement with me, and we visited my flowers, and birds, and other possessions, to our mutual satisfaction, and the growth of our more intimate acquaintance.

“This is a nice place,” said the little girl, as we concluded our survey. “I wish we had known you before, for we shall be going away soon, and my governess will be coming back from Paris, and then good-bye to all pleasant things!”

We were soon after joined by Dr. Grey,

Lady Helena, and her brother, and then they began speaking of a project they had formed for a sort of picnic to the new moors, where they were to drive the "charming little pony-carriage Miss Lawson had been so good as to lend them." They were to take luncheon, and spend a long, happy Summer day; and then Lady Margaret exclaimed,

"Oh! Mrs. Grey, do come too! It would be so nice. And bring your dear little dog Tiny" (a small black smooth-haired little terrier dog, my usual companion). "And I will promise him no end of biscuit and chicken bones if he will come with you. There, you see he hears me, and wags his ridiculous little tail to say 'Yes!'"

The child was very eager on the subject, and I did not like to say "No" to her, but I looked at the elder sister to see how she took the impromptu invitation issued by her sister. Lady Helena returned my look

of inquiry by saying, with a slight hesitation, and a passing flush over her sallow face,

“Margaret is very presumptuous in asking you and Dr. Grey to meet us on your own moor, but if you should be driving that way at the time we are there, I am sure we should be pleased to meet.”

Lady Helena said no more. It was plain she had performed a task in saying so much, but no more was needed. I said I should be very glad to take my chance of finding them some time in the afternoon, and would drive my pony that way in the hope of meeting.

“Oh! don't talk about a chance meeting,” exclaimed the child, who had apparently taken a fancy to us. “Do say ‘Yes, I will come.’ Now won't you, Dr. Grey?” in a little coaxing tone, that she was no doubt accustomed to find irresistible.

Lady Margaret was, however, informed that Dr. Grey's time belonged to his pa-

tients, and he had not much for play, but if he could manage it he would come also ; and after a little more solicitation on the part of the child, her sister told her it was time to go away, and she hoped they might see us the next day.

I thought, as Lady Helena settled herself in the carriage by her brother, that her countenance brightened, as if in a feeling of relief that the visit was over, and yet it did not appear to me that it was from pride, or any dislike to making our acquaintance that she was so glad the visit was over, and I made this remark to my husband as we turned into the house, after seeing the departure of our guests. Dr. Grey smiled at my observation, and said.

“ She is shy, my dear—simply and honestly shy—much more so than most of our Castleford young ladies. She is a well-informed girl, but *very* plain, and she knows it, and it makes her uncomfortable.”

The next day I drove out to meet our new friends, and found all the party on the moor. The two young ladies were just finishing their luncheon, whilst their brother deferred his till his new friend could join him. It was rather an awkward position for all, and I saw Lady Helena looked uneasy, whilst her sister kept calling to her brother and Mr. Lawson to join them ; but the latter walked to a little distance, saying he would come back when their meal was over, and then Lionel got up and joined him, and after a time both came back, and were just seated on the grass as I drove up.

My acquaintance with Bertie Lawson was only through his sister, as, in spite of his many recommendations and gentleman-like appearance, he did not mix in the *crème* of the Castleford society. He was often asked to bachelor dinners, and had many hunting acquaintances in the upper classes, but still it was against *les conve-*

nances that the inn-keeper's son should be received on a footing of equality with many who considered themselves so infinitely his superiors.

Lady Helena joined me immediately, and seemed less constrained as we walked away by ourselves on the springy turf, with the beautiful moors, all purple and yellow, stretched out around us. We talked for a little time on various subjects, and I found Lady Helena in a more communicative mood than when there were more people present. She spoke of the pleasure she had enjoyed in their present mode of life, so unfettered and free.

"No doubt I should get tired of it in time," she added, "but everything seems so fresh, and the people appear to be so good, and so wonderfully clever in this part of the world."

I laughed as I told her she must not reckon her present host's family as an average specimen—Mr. and Mrs. Lawson

were superior people, and both Lucy and her brother were particularly well brought up and educated young people.

“And so talented,” amended the young lady.

“Yes, Lucy has very fair talents; she draws and plays and sings nicely. Have you never heard her?”

Lady Helena's sallow face flushed as she answered, rather uneasily,

“No, never—I never liked to ask her, and we have got her piano, I hear, in our room, for which I constantly reproach myself, but do not like to return it, for fear they might think we do not value the attention; but we shall soon be gone now, I am sorry to say, but I shall always think with pleasure of my stay at the ‘Castle Inn,’ and so will Lionel. I never saw him so much pleased with anyone before.”

I perceived she alluded to Bertie Lawson, so I answered her thoughts—

“I am glad your brother has found a

companion where he could so little have expected it; but I have heard Dr. Grey, as well as others, say they consider young Lawson quite a genius."

"Do they indeed!" replied Lady Helena; then turning to me with kindling dark eyes, she exclaimed, after a moment's pause, "I worship genius!—people in general are so dull, and they think so much more of rank and riches than the rare gifts of intellect. Oh, it is a very stupid, undiscerning world we live in!"

My only answer was a general one.

"I think people are rather apt to graft their opinions upon those of the world around them, and to value things according to the estimation they are held in by others."

"Perhaps so, but," she added, after a moment's pause, in a low, subdued tone, "I do not think *I* do."

Lady Margaret came running to us with her hands full of flowers to ask the names,

as they were most of them peculiar to the soil, and being country born and bred, I was able to satisfy her, except in one instance when, finding me ignorant, the little girl exclaimed,

“I will take it to Mr. Lawson, Nurse Norris says he knows everything, so I shall ask him.”

She sped away with her treasure to the place where we had left the two young men, and her sister and I followed slowly, discussing the various specimens of plants she had left in our hands. As we approached, little Margaret, or Daisy, as her brother and sister called her, was waving her bunch of flowers triumphantly in her hand and calling out to us,

“*He* knows it!—he has told me!—I wish I knew as much as Mr. Lawson does; and here is Dr. Grey coming—oh, I am so glad!”

My husband rode up, and after a few words of greeting to Lady Helena, said

he had taken the moor on his way home, instead of going by the road, in the hope of finding their party there; he then joined the two young men, cordially shaking hands with Bertie Lawson as well as Lionel Elmsley, and entering into conversation with them both. This moor seemed to bring us all more together, and Lady Helena, in a timid voice, asked Bertie some questions in reference to the various plants and flowers around, whilst her brother appeared to forget that his sister was in any way violating *les conventions* in so doing.

After a time, the young men went off to their sport, my husband with them, and then the two girls and myself being rather tired with our long ramble, sat down on the turf and waited till the evening wore gently away, and we began to think of returning home, and for that purpose signalled to our respective attendants in the pony-carriages to bring them up.

“ Oh, let us come here very soon again,” cried Lady Margaret, as she returned breathless from a long run with my Tiny.

I made the desired promise, as both the child and the little dog seemed to have struck up so vehement a friendship. I would have asked them to come to our house, but Lady Helena had given me to understand that visiting in a general way was prohibited by their father, and going to see the coins had been rather an infringement of the rules.

CHAPTER V.

UPON second thoughts, I did not repeat my visit to the moors for the purpose of meeting the young ladies Elmsley. It occurred to me that the restriction laid upon their visiting by their father must extend to the making any acquaintances in Castleford, or was intended to do so. I therefore considered my half promise to the little Lady Margaret would be more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

I was sorry, however, to miss the opportunity of improving my acquaintance with Lady Helena, for I was young in those days, though some few years her senior, and I was fond of speculating on any

new phase of character that came within my ken. It had struck me, in my long talk with Lady Helena the day before, that she was a girl of a peculiar turn of mind. There was, moreover, a little tinge of bitterness under all she said, that surprised me in one so young, and apparently so fenced in from all worldly experiences that could cause the feeling, and I wondered from what source it could spring. It was evidently perfectly natural to her, and in no ways affected, as the result of superior wisdom or virtue. She seemed to have very decided opinions of her own, and to entertain sentiments somewhat at variance with those I supposed to be current amongst people born and brought up in purple as she had been. All this displayed itself dimly, through a certain veil of reserve which was never entirely laid aside, although occasionally lifted when she became interested in the subject of conver-

sation, and forgetful of herself and her hearer.

Lady Helena, with all her coldness of manner, seemed very capable of entertaining warm feelings of attachment towards those she loved. Her brother and little sister were evidently objects of intense affection to her. I saw it in her anxiety for their enjoyment, and in the way she entered into Margaret's childish amusements. I perceived she had come very unwillingly to call upon me the previous day, although pleased with the sight of the coins, the value of which she was able so justly to appreciate; but I was sure she would rather have dispensed with that gratification, in consideration of her father's wishes, though she could not bear to disappoint her brother, or seem to slight the little effort he had made to give her pleasure.

She was, besides, as Dr. Grey had dis-

covered, naturally and constitutionally diffident and shy. She gave me to understand, in the course of our long chat, that she had not been a great deal, as yet, into society. Her two sisters were some years older than herself, the eldest being six and twenty, and I had heard from others they were both very handsome—more like the little girl, who, they said, strongly resembled her beautiful mother. Perhaps her sisters' personal advantages and superiority in this respect might in some degree account for her backwardness to enter into society, where with her lack of beauty and fascination (despite her thoroughly ladylike appearance), she could only serve as a foil to them.

I was sorry to lose all further opportunity, as I then supposed, of seeing more of this girl, who excited a very strong feeling of interest in my mind, but I would not try to draw her into an acquaintance that possibly her father might not approve of.

On the day when I gave up my intended drive to the moor, my thoughts turned to Lucy, who, I supposed, might be doing nothing at home, and would be at liberty to spend the day with me. I sent a note to ask the question, and in answer to it Lucy came herself. She told me the young ladies had not driven to the moor that day, as Mr. Elmsley wished to take them in another direction, to see some particular place of note before they left the county—their departure being fixed for the next week.

My first comment on her piece of information was confined to my own thoughts—

“Then I should have gone to meet the young ladies in vain, so it is as well I determined to stay at home, as it seems they had no further intention of improving our acquaintance.”

The next observation I made was *viva voce*.

“You will not be sorry, I daresay, Lucy,

when your present company take their departure, and leave you in peaceful possession of your piano and pony-carriage."

"Oh! they are very welcome," said Lucy, hurriedly. "My father is pleased to give them pleasure, and I should be very selfish to begrudge it to them—and for such a short time."

"How long have they been with you?"

"Not quite a month, and I hear they have enjoyed it very much; and so, I am sure, has Bertie. I only hope it will not spoil him. Mr. Elmsley has made him his constant companion, quite as an equal, and you know—or perhaps you don't know, dear Mrs. Grey—how poor Bertie's wishes and aspirations all tend to something higher than the state of life in which he was born."

"Well, there is no harm in that, Lucy, every man and woman has a right to rise in life, if they can do it honestly, and are fitted to occupy a higher position in it—

and that, I believe, from all I hear, is your brother's case?"

"Yes, I believe Bertie is clever enough for anything he may wish to undertake; and I fancy he hopes, from all this association with the Elmsleys, and their evident liking for and appreciation of him, that it may be an opening to some higher grade in life than succeeding my father as landlord of the 'Castle Inn.'"

Lucy sighed as she said this, for she had never seen that there was anything derogatory in keeping up the old name as she had always seen it, and she regretted, I know, that Bertie was beginning to have aspirations that might eventually separate him from his family and their long-established calling.

In the afternoon of that same day Lucy and I took a long stroll through the meadows by the river-side. It was then early in September, and lovely and enjoyable weather, still warm and summery, with a

slight *soupçon* of coming Autumn in the evening air. As we were returning home slowly, pausing every now and then to gather a lingering wild flower or tuft of grass, our attention was diverted by the sight of a couple leisurely sauntering in front of us, a young man and woman, evidently deeply engrossed in the delights of each other's society. As we came nearer, and were about to pass them, I saw the girl was tall and graceful, and no doubt equally well-favoured in other respects, whilst the young man, from his height and general figure, appeared a very fitting companion, though I could not see their faces. The girl seemed to be clinging to the man's arm, whilst her face was raised to his, and judging from the pose of the head inclined towards her, there must have been an interchange of very tender love looks between the absorbed pair.

"I fear we are breaking in upon an interesting crisis," I observed to Lucy, as

we drew to one side with the intention of passing at a little distance.

Lucy made no answer for a moment. She was rather short-sighted, and had been earnestly scanning the couple. She then whispered,

“I thought it must be, and I see it is, Bertie and Alice Young. We, or rather I, must just speak to them.”

The little rustle our dresses made on the grass as we drew so near startled the lovers into a sense of the existence of other beings besides themselves in the world, and before they turned their gaze on the intruding passers-by, the girl withdrew her arm, and the man stiffened his neck till his head resumed its proper perpendicular position, and then they turned and faced the enemy. Lucy laughed as they did so, whilst I withdrew a step or two, but heard her say,

“Good evening, Bertie—how do you do, Alice? I had no idea it was you; I only

saw it was this moment. What a lovely evening for a walk ! Mrs. Grey and I have been all round the meadow fields."

Lucy's coolness seemed to reassure the couple, and then they both glanced in my direction, young Lawson raising his hat, and Alice making a species of bow of acknowledgment of our very slight acquaintance, which, of course, I instantly returned ; and then a few words passed between us regarding the beauty of the evening, and the shortening of the days, which seemed to be a hint to shorten our interview, and in another minute Lucy and I went our way, preceding the young couple, and soon entirely losing sight of them.

I observed how very pretty Alice Young was ; her fair face was slightly flushed with a delicate rose-tint, and her dark grey eyes were soft with an unshed tear that still trembled on the long dark lashes which constituted one of her peculiar beauties. They were indeed a remarkably

handsome couple, the inn-keeper's son and the schoolmaster's daughter, and I remarked to Lucy that they seemed well suited to each other in every respect.

"Yes," said Lucy, "I only wish they would make up their minds and be married at once. No one who sees them together can doubt their attachment to each other, and it has been going on so long. Bertie is now four-and-twenty, and Alice is twenty. I cannot see why they should wait till they are any older."

"Perhaps the young lady has not made up her mind yet; she is so very lovely, I should think she might marry well any day."

"Yes, but she thinks there is no one in the world to compare with Bertie, and her father makes no objection—at least, he is always asking my brother to his house, and has done so ever since he was a boy at school, and I believe Bertie has been, in his way, in love with Alice ever since she was a little girl in pinafores."

“Perhaps he finds this time of courtship such a happy one that he is not eager to shorten it whilst they are both so young, and he may wish to secure a more independent position before he takes a wife.”

“Yes, Bertie is very cautious, but my father would, I am sure, settle him and his wife quite independently, if Bertie chose to run the risk; but he is very happy and well amused as he is, and does not care, I fear, to give up any of his pleasures, which he must do as a married man. He knows Alice loves him too well ever to think of anyone else, so he feels he can take his time, and marry Alice whenever he is disposed to settle quietly down. Forgive my troubling you with all this. I cannot help feeling for Alice, though she is a high-spirited girl, and would never complain; but I think she had been crying when we met her just then. Perhaps she thinks Bertie does not love her as devotedly as she does him, but I feel sure he

does—though, of course, a man is more selfish than a woman, and thinks first of himself, as he is generally brought up to do.”

I exclaimed against the view taken by Lucy in her despondency, and said we were all variable creatures, some naturally more or less selfish, whether man or woman, and I did not believe it to be the peculiar attribute of either sex; but Lucy would not be convinced; she shook her head, and only observed,

“There may be *some* unselfish men in the world, but I believe there are more unselfish women—it is in the nature of things it should be so,” and perhaps she was *rather* in the right.

“There is another Miss Young at home?” I asked Lucy, hoping to divert her thoughts from the contemplation of the selfishness of mankind in general, and her brother in particular.

“Yes, one, a little older than Alice.

She is a good, quiet creature, Sophy Young, the plain one of the family, but her father's right hand, the comfort of his life. It would be a sad day to Mr. Young if Sophy were to marry; she keeps house for him, and writes and does everything. I am sure she would never leave her father; he is very fond of both the girls, but I think he could spare Alice the easiest, and as things are, that is fortunate."

Talking thus, we walked on, and reached home just as the sun was setting. Lucy would have left me then, but I persuaded her to stay to our six o'clock dinner, when I expected Dr. Grey would have returned, and I promised to send her home in the evening.

When we entered the house, my first inquiry was for my husband. Our two women-servants were standing in the hall, apparently waiting for me, and I felt alarmed as I saw the two women exchange

significant looks as Lucy and I entered, and one answered hastily,

“Oh, yes, ma’am, Dr. Grey has been in, but is gone out again this half-hour.”

Sarah said no more, but looked so perturbed that I remarked,

“Nothing particularly the matter, I hope, to call him away just now—no accident to anyone we know?” I asked, anxiously, as the two women stood as if waiting to be questioned.

The elder of the two looked at Lucy and answered,

“Not particularly as *you* know, ma’am, but Miss Lawson will be very sorry to hear.”

Then it was Lucy’s turn to exclaim, which she did, turning very white,

“Nothing to my father or mother? I know my brother is all right; I passed him a few minutes ago. Pray tell me at once! anything is better than suspense.”

“No, miss, nothing happened to the

old gentleman or his lady, but your beautiful ponies and carriage and the poor young ladies as was driving in it; such a smash, as I hear!"

"Good heavens!" said poor Lucy, catching hold of my arm to prevent herself falling, she trembled so violently. "Oh, those poor girls! what has happened to them? and all away from their own people—poor dears, poor dears!"

"Yes, miss, and one—the little one, is very badly hurt—all but killed, I hear, and oh, your beautiful carriage all broke to pieces!"

"That's nothing!" cried Lucy, impatiently. "Only tell me—is it Lady Margaret, or her sister, or both and the young man?"

"All safe, I hear, except the child, and she was behind when the ponies started, and she would jump out, and fell on her head; she has never spoken since, and my master is with her now."

Whilst Lucy was interrogating the servants, I had gone out and ordered my own pony-carriage, which soon came round, and then I told Lucy I would drive her home and see the real state of the case, hoping things might not be as bad as represented. We soon arrived at the "Castle Inn," keeping silence all the way; we were met at the door by my husband, who looked very anxious, but helped us quietly out of the carriage, observing, in a low voice,

"This is a most unfortunate accident! I am glad you have come; perhaps you can help to calm Lady Helena; she is almost distracted."

"Then it is the child that is hurt?" I asked.

"Yes, very seriously, I fear, but we can hardly tell at present."

"And how did it happen?"

"We can only make out from Lady Helena that, her brother having left the carriage to go and look at some horses in

a field near, she took the reins and thought she would drive round to meet him by a short cut (he had told her to wait his return, and sent a boy to stand at the ponies' head); turning a corner rather sharply, something frightened the horses, and she lost all control over them; however, she tried to guide them, and told the little girl to hold on and sit still; unfortunately she disobeyed, jumped out, her foot caught in the step, and she came with her head against the ground; there is a contused wound and concussion of the brain, but still I believe there is no fracture. I have sent an express north for Lord Ashford, and another to London for Dr. W——."

"And Lady Helena?"

"She was overturned, but not hurt—at least she says she is not; the ponies ran on with the *débris* of the carriage till they stopped at their own gate. I fear neither of them will be of much use again. But go now to Lady Helena; I am obliged to

keep her out of her sister's room; the nurse is with her, and I have done all that the present state of the case admits."

CHAPTER VI.

IT was no time to stand on ceremony, I therefore walked straight to the door of the room Lucy pointed out as Lady Helena's, and having slightly knocked and receiving no answer, I opened it and entered unannounced. It was getting dark, but there was still light enough to show me the figure of Lady Helena pacing to and fro in the disordered-looking room. Evidently the poor child had been brought in there first, and there were various distressing proofs of her temporary presence. Nothing could be more dreary and desolate-looking than the apartment as I saw it in the gloom of the gathering twilight, and no doubt it would have been still more dismal

had the full light of the Summer sun been shining down upon it. Poor Lady Helena was herself a pitiable object—so different from the dainty neatness that characterised her appearance, both as regarded her person and dress. Nothing had been changed in the latter since she had been conveyed home with her poor little sister after the overturn; her delicate cambric morning-dress was now all torn and rumpled and soiled, and her black silk scarf (the fashion of those days) was pulled awry and hung in disorder; her poor hands (still in the neat light gloves which had fitted so perfectly) were exposed through the rents made in falling on stony ground, and were bleeding in many places, but all unheeded by the agonised girl who wrung them or clasped them together as she paced the room; her bonnet had been hastily removed, and lay crushed and soiled by the side of the sofa, on which, no doubt, they had placed poor little Margaret when first

brought to the house. Lady Helena's abundant dark hair was all in disorder, falling in masses on her shoulders and matted with the dew of anguish on her forehead; she was indeed a melancholy spectacle, and it made my heart ache to see her trouble. As I came into the room and approached her, she stopped suddenly in her walk and said, in an abrupt, harsh voice,

“Who are you? What do you want? This is my room; you cannot come here.”

I saw her eyes were unnaturally distended, as if they had looked upon some appalling sight, but they were dry and tearless, and yet shone with a dull light in the midst of her sallow pain-stricken face. She surveyed me with an unrecognising stare, and then, seeing I did not retreat, turned away with an impatient gesture, and would have resumed her troubled walk, but I laid my hand on her arm and told her who I was, and ventured

to express something of the deep sympathy I felt for her distress, at the same time trying, if possible, to insinuate a ray of hope into her tortured mind as to the possibility of a favourable issue to her little sister's fearful accident—just one ray. Lady Helena heard me with forced attention, and then passed one of her wounded hands over her forehead, and said,

“Yes, I know now; you must excuse my forgetting at such a time—I remember; you are Dr. Grey's wife. Oh, cannot you persuade him to let me see her; it is so cruel to be kept away from her, and my poor darling dying—perhaps dead!”

She almost shrieked the last word in her agony of mind, and then I took occasion to observe,

“If that were the case, Lady Helena, if your poor little sister were really no more, there would be no need for such a precaution. It is in the hope of saving

her precious life that my husband will let no one approach the room, but those who are absolutely of use in such a critical case."

"Then did he tell you there *was* hope? For myself, I have none!—none! none!" And the poor girl sank down in an agony of grief on the sofa, to which I had guided her almost unconsciously.

As she said these words she looked in my face with such a hungering gaze in her large, dry, grief-stricken eyes, craving for some comfort, that I could not resist, even in the uncertainty of the case, trying to convey what small consolation I dared offer. She listened to me, greedily devouring every word of hope, and then, as she appeared at last to admit the possibility of her sister's recovery, she threw herself back with a stifled cry, and, for the first time, burst into tears. I was glad to see them, and let the passionate weeping continue without interruption. At last the

storm seemed to have spent itself, and she raised her tear-stained face, with a sort of muttered apology, and would have risen, and no doubt left the room. I just remarked,

“This is no time for apologies, or I ought, perhaps, to offer one for disturbing you in your grief, Lady Helena; but I feel sure you will excuse me, my only wish is to be of some little service to you, whilst your own maid is engaged with your sister upstairs. You must not neglect yourself. Let me remove your gloves. I see you have not escaped unhurt yourself.”

“Oh! it is nothing—it is nothing—only a few scratches in putting out my hands when I fell. There,” she added, tearing off the remnants of her gloves, “you see it is not worth thinking about. But, oh! if it had but been I, instead of my poor sweet Daisy! Oh! what would I not give to change places with her; and to think of poor papa, too!”

“But surely that would not have mended the matter,” I argued, anxious to get her to talk a little rationally, and break the spell of terror that seemed almost to affect her brain. “If you had been the one to suffer, Lord Ashford’s distress would not have been mitigated.”

Lady Helena stopped me there with an abrupt movement of her hand, saying,

“Hush! hush! you don’t know what you are talking about; and how should you? And there is no occasion for my telling you that one hair of that lovely darling’s head is of more value to my father than the whole body of his less-favoured daughter. But, oh! what does that signify? It is all very right and natural, no doubt; but when he sees that wounded head, oh! what will he say to *me*, who have been the whole and sole cause of this terrible misfortune?”

I was shocked to hear the poor girl talk thus, but at last she grew calmer, as she

rambled on, it seemed to relieve her mind of some of the horrible weight that lay upon it. And then, when she was quieter, I succeeded in persuading her to let me look at her poor bruised hands, telling her I was something of a doctor as well as my husband, and must prescribe for her.

I fetched warm water and washed and bound up the parts which were hurt, and then I sent Lucy for a clean loose dressing-gown, and removed all her torn, soiled dress, putting on the fresh one and combing out her tangled hair and knotting it up, and gently washing her face as well as her hands. I then made her lie upon the sofa, brought her some tea, and watched by her till she fell asleep from sorrow and exhaustion. When I had seen my patient thus quiet and settled, I went to inquire after the poor little girl upstairs; there was no change there, and my husband shook his head.

“It is a very bad case,” he said, in answer to my tearful inquiries. “Poor little woman, she lies there as still and white as death ! but the heart is still beating, though feebly, and it is not all over yet, and whilst there is life there is hope, especially at her age—the vital principle is so strong, so self-asserting; she *may* pull through, but she is a fragile flower, and I dare not be too sanguine.”

All that night passed wearily away ; Dr. Grey never left the poor child, watching patiently for some sign of returning consciousness. After much persuasion, I got Lady Helena into her own room and to bed, assuring her that Lord Ashford could not arrive at soonest till the middle of next day. Railways were rather in their infancy in those days ; we had one to Castleford—at least, one within a mile or two, but there were several breaks in the line that reached only partly to the place in Scotland where Lord Ashford was then

staying ; happily it was not very far north, for he had not reached his own place in Inverness-shire, and was still paying visits on his way there.

The following week, which had been settled for the departure of the two girls and their brother from the " Castle Inn," was also to have taken the rest of the family home. So far it was fortunate, and the less distance to London was more rapidly performed by Dr. Wallis, who answered the pressing summons of his friend without loss of time, and arrived at Castleford early in the next day after the accident. The two doctors were agreed in their opinion as to the severity of the case, and of the imminence of the poor child's danger. But no decisive change had taken place when Lord Ashford arrived the middle of the same day, yet she was no worse ; he came accompanied by his eldest daughter, Lady Katherine, who brought her own maid and another

woman from Edinburgh to help poor Mrs. Norris in her arduous duties as nurse.

The arrival of this party made a great stir in the quiet Inn, and caused something of a diversion of interest from its central point. I had occupied a sofa in Lady Helena's room, and had watched by her and endeavoured to soothe her waking hours during that long, watchful night, and had also at her request sat with her the next morning in her room downstairs till the arrival of her relations. I could not bear to leave her in her sorrow and solitude till then, but as soon as the inevitable bustle in the house announced that Lord Ashford and his party had duly arrived, I was only too glad to prepare for my return home.

Lady Helena sprang to her feet as soon as she became aware that her father was actually in the house. She looked very white and wild, and grasped my arm to

detain me, as I would have passed quietly out of the room ; she whispered—

“Don’t go just yet ; do wait and tell them *how* it all happened, for I cannot, and if they blame me I shall die.”

“How *can* anyone blame you, dear Lady Helena ?” I answered, as soothingly as I could. “You have suffered enough yourself from the accident, and might have been much more severely hurt.”

“Oh, I cannot help wishing I had been, and if that could have saved his darling.”

I would still have left the room, but had not time before Lord Ashford and his daughter entered. He was very much worn and altered since I remembered him ten years before, when I gazed at him and his then lovely wife in the Castle pew on those memorable occasions when they had appeared in Castleford Church. I drew back into the shade, intending to escape as soon as they had left me a free passage to the

door. But Lady Katherine, with her fine tall figure, filled all the available space, and stood close by it, whilst Lord Ashford advanced to greet his daughter. He took both her hands in his, kissed her on the forehead, and said,

“This is a sad and unexpected meeting, Helena. I fear you have not been as careful of my poor Daisy as I hoped you might have been ; but there, there, do not cry,” as Helena burst into a passion of tears. He continued—“No one blames you ; pray do not distress and agitate yourself and me more than is needful. It is all sad enough without any addition. We do not blame Helena, do we, Kate ?” turning to his elder daughter.

Then the lady addressed came forward, whilst Lady Helena, hastily drying her tears, met her with a sisterly embrace, not remarkable for its warmth—at least, I fancied so ; then, happening to observe I was hesitating which way to turn, she

came to my relief, quietly naming me to her father and sister, and saying,

“This is Mrs. Grey, Dr. Grey’s wife, papa; she has been so good to me in my trouble, I cannot thank her enough, and I want you and Kate to help me to do so, and she can tell you more about everything, and Dr. Grey’s opinion, than I can do. I think I should have gone out of my senses yesterday without her.”

Both the father and sister responded graciously to this introduction. They had already been met by both the attendant doctors, and were so far satisfied to find that no worse symptoms had appeared during the night, and that being the case, they began to admit with much caution the possibility of hope, and to this very measured opinion Lord Ashford clung with all the tenacity produced by his former despair.

Lady Katherine civilly observed how much her father and herself were indebted

for the kind and prompt attention both her sisters had received from Dr. Grey and myself, with other obliging remarks she evidently thought right and proper to make on the occasion, adding that her sister Lady Helena was so unused to scenes of sickness or trouble that she was sure she would have been very helpless and utterly prostrated if I had not so kindly come to her assistance.

Lady Helena, meanwhile, had drawn her father to the sofa, and making him sit down by her side, began to offer, as it seemed to me, a sort of exculpation of her own conduct (which I thought very needless), and to which Lord Ashford listened with a weary, preoccupied look.

"You do not blame me, dear papa?" she added, with an anxious look.

"Oh, no, no," he replied to his daughter's appeal; "but you might have taken Norris with you, and she might have prevented poor Daisy's rash action in jumping

out ; but of course you could not have foreseen the danger, or would have avoided it ; yet you *might* have been more careful, if you had considered the risk of putting the poor child alone in the seat behind."

Lady Helena's sallow face clouded over as her father said this, and she only observed,

"I *did* think, papa, and would have gone behind myself, only I thought in case of the ponies falling or doing anything, she would be in the safest place, and so did Lionel."

"Oh, yes," said Lord Ashford, in the same tone, without apparently noticing his daughter's discomfiture ; "Lionel is just as thoughtless as any of you ; but I thought Norris had more sense. Where is the boy ? I just saw him for a moment as I came in, but I had no time to say much to him, I was in such a hurry to see the doctor ; but I must go and find him now ;" and seemingly glad of the excuse to escape, Lord Ashford rose and left the

room, and following his example, I made my parting adieux to the young ladies, and was glad to return to my own home.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a week after the accident Lady Margaret hovered between life and death, but after that time began slowly to return to life and consciousness. The greatest care had to be observed to keep her perfectly tranquil and without the least excitement. Her father and sister were only allowed to see her sleeping, and both doctors strongly insisted that she should know nothing of their arrival, or suspect in any way that her danger had brought them to see her.

“Let her return as quietly as possible to a state of observation; do not present any new objects to her perception, or say or do the least thing to set her brain thinking.

Let the child, as she regains the full use of her senses, find everything just the same as when she left the house before the accident occurred ; her mind will naturally revert to that period, and if she sees only the same people, and hears nothing to excite her, the brain will repose quietly, and by degrees be restored to its accustomed power of perception ; but do not force it into premature activity."

These were the stringent rules laid down by both doctors for their little patient, and all were bound to observe them.

Lord Ashford, as his custom was, grumbled a little in his quiet way, but observed, as soon as the child was out of danger, that there was no use in his remaining, as he was not allowed to see his little daughter, and he could not waste all his time at the Inn, till she was considered strong enough to bear the interview without danger.

Dr. Grey, backed by the elder and then

more experienced London doctor, was of opinion that a full month or six weeks ought to elapse before Lady Margaret should venture upon travelling, or doing anything, or seeing anyone likely to excite her. Dr. Wallis's advice on the occasion was that Lord Ashford and Lady Katherine, and the strange nurse, should all return to their respective homes, and leave the child entirely surrounded by those she was with before the accident, and let everything go on just the same, without any appearance of change or anxiety about her, only taking such gentle exercise as she was able to bear, accompanied by her sister, Lady Helena, and Nurse Norris, and allowing her to be amused as far as possible without any excitement, giving her her own way in every respect, where no harm was likely to ensue.

After all these instructions, Dr. Wallis confided the case entirely into the younger physician's hands, and said his further

attendance was no longer required.

During the fortnight that Lord Ashford remained at Castleford watching, unseen, the little girl's slow recovery, I saw a good deal of Lady Katherine. Lord Ashford amused himself at his own place, coming down to the Inn only to dine and sleep; for, as I have said, there were no servants there, except the old man and his wife who lived in the Castle. So Lord Ashford roamed over the house and grounds, and the portions of his remaining territory round about (by no means extensive), and found something to occupy him the greater part of the day, but he did not appear to be a person whose interest was ever very keen in anything.

Lord Ashford looked and spoke like a disappointed man, one who had not found the world a pleasant or satisfactory place, and yet who clung to it, and to such gratifications as it might still present to him. He was poor for his position, and encum-

bered by a large family of eight children, for whom he could make no adequate provision—it therefore became very incumbent on the daughters to marry speedily and well.

It was very certain that Lady Katherine had shown no haste in that way, and I only wondered that she had remained so long at the head of her father's house. She was a fine, handsome, distinguished-looking woman, with pleasant but very decided manners. She often walked down to our house to relieve the tedium of her enforced residence at the Old Inn, where she was not allowed to attend her little sister, and had none of her customary occupations to beguile her time. She and Lady Helena appeared to have little or nothing in common between them. Their opinions and tastes seemed to be at variance on most subjects, and they rarely even walked out together. Helena was allowed to sit in her little sister's room,

and I believe found that the pleasantest place during her elder sister's stay.

Still there was nothing like discord between them. Lady Helena generally submitted quietly to her sister's dictation, or took her own way without open opposition; she was naturally silent and undemonstrative, offering both in person and mind the most striking contrast to her handsome, energetic sister. Lady Katherine was a great talker; she loved the sound of her own voice, and, above all, giving the benefit of her advice and opinions to those less capable than herself, and those, I believe, embraced a very large portion of her ladyship's friends and acquaintance. She liked also to talk of herself; her family and her own affairs, and *faute de mieux* made me a recipient of many of her confidences, whilst she did not disdain to advise me on many matters I should have considered too small for her observation. Lady Katherine would stroll down in the

morning with her little bit of *broderie* in her pocket, and, sitting down for an hour or two's friendly chat, would run on without any fear of interruption from me, only seeming to desire a quiet listener. She told me one morning that her father was sending her brother home that day, for there was no use in his losing all his time at the Inn.

"Besides," she added, "hanging on like an incubus to that good-looking young man, who seems to have been a special providence to him whilst there, but who, no doubt, has plenty of profitable occupation, and more to his taste than following that boy about like his shadow."

I said, what I believed to be truly the case, that it must have been a gratification to young Lawson to have had the opportunity of such companionship. Lady Katherine paused a moment, examined the last stitches of her work minutely, then looked up with a little laugh and observed,

“As to *companionship*, that is hardly the question ; I never supposed there was much *companionship* in the matter, or I should have said the inn-keeper's son would not have been very eligible in that light for my brother, and in that case the sooner the *liaison* ended the better.”

I hastened rather foolishly to assure Lady Katherine that the old inn-keeper's son was considered a most superior person, both as to general acquirements and in regard to those accomplishments which were the result of natural genius.

The high-born lady smiled a little incredulously I thought, but in well-bred toleration of my local prejudices observed,

“Oh, no doubt he is a superior young man to his station in life, and, in fact, so are many of our Highland gillies who have been well brought up at the schools at our place in the north. I have known some turn out very respectably in life, and as for the Lawson family, I have always

heard my father say that the old man was such a superior person, and he and all his family have been tenants for centuries in our family—but I speak of things that are past,” said Lady Katherine, correcting herself. “For of course you are aware that my grandfather sold the greater part of the Castleford property, and that Mr. Lawson’s father was the purchaser of the Old Inn and a large farm that adjoined; so they are no longer tenants, yet I daresay they do not forget the old tie that united the families in past generations, and it seems both the old man and his son are pleased to acknowledge its former existence.”

“Have you seen anything of the daughter?” I asked, at a pause in her ladyship’s discourse.

She replied—

“Miss Lawson? yes; I spoke to her the other day—a nice, quiet, modest-looking girl. Some girls, you know, brought up in an inn, are so different, so flaunting,

and every way objectionable ; but really this young woman is almost ladylike in manner and appearance, and, Norris tells me, was to have married above her station, a young officer, only he died. I was surprised to find from Helena that she knew so little about Miss Lawson, for when I saw her I felt sure Helena would have sought her acquaintance."

"Oh, no, I know she did not. Lady Helena seemed to avoid making any acquaintances. I understood it was in obedience to Lord Ashford's wishes."

"And mine also," amended the elder sister. "We feared that, if Helena had *carte blanche* as to visiting, she would have become acquainted with half Castleford. She is not to be trusted to form her own acquaintance at present ; she is very shy, although her opinions are so decided, and she finds it easier to get on with her inferiors, who would naturally defer to her,

and thereby save her the discomfort she often finds in the society of her equals."

I did not make any comment on this communication, for I could not tell how far it was applicable to Lady Helena, but I could not help thinking that the poor girl's position in her own family was not altogether an enviable one.

A few days later, Lady Katherine came again, and brought a piece of news that seemed to give her lively satisfaction. She told me they had that morning received the tidings of her sister, Lady Rosamond's, engagement to a Sir Archibald Cameron, a man of very old family, large fortune, and great personal advantages. It seemed that Lady Rosamond was quite her favourite sister, and, I imagine, she had been left at the house where they were staying when the rest of the family came to the Old Inn, in hope of such a happy result following her prolonged visit. Lady

Katherine seemed delighted at her sister's happy prospects, and I honoured her for the unselfish joy she felt in the prospect of a separation which, though so much to her sister's advantage, would leave her (as she said) "so desolate."

"But you have happily two sisters still left to fill up the gap," I ventured to observe.

"Ah!" she answered, "but my poor little Daisy is still such a child, though a very charming one; and as to Helena—well, she is a very dear, good girl in her way, I daresay, but you must have seen that her ways are not my ways, nor her thoughts my thoughts; they may be better or worse—it is not for me to decide that knotty point—only I know, when my sweet Rose is transplanted, I shall feel her loss very much."

I thought it was a great pity that poor Lady Helena was so little appreciated in her own family, and could find no ade-

quate ground for it, for that she was plain, whilst the others were handsome, seemed rather a reason why they should make up with their affection for any mortification the consciousness of that inferiority might cause the sensitive girl.

One day I asked Lady Katherine whether the bride elect was like her and the little sister, or whether she resembled Lady Helena, and, I added, her father?

“Oh! you don’t think Helena like my father?” she replied.

I said, “She strikes me as being the only one of you who is like Lord Ashford, and I thought perhaps Lady Rosamond might also resemble him.”

“Have you never heard,” asked Lady Katherine, “that Lady Rosamond is considered the beauty, *par excellence*, of our family? And most justly so, for she is really lovely—not quite like any of us. But do you know I met a very beautiful girl in the street this morning, as I was

coming here, and it struck me that she was like my Rose. Do you know who she is? Really such a lovely, graceful girl. I was quite surprised to see her here."

Then, as I laughed at the implied compliment to our native town, Lady Katherine laughed also and said,

"Forgive my seeming rudeness, but really such beauty is rare anywhere, and no one had told me that its possessor dwelt so near. Please tell me the beauty's name."

I was sure that Lady Katherine must have met Alice Young, as she was the only girl I knew who at all answered to the description she gave, and I accordingly told her I believed she was the daughter of one of the masters at our Grammar School.

"Well, really this Miss Young deserves a better fate than to bloom unseen and unappreciated here. She would make quite a sensation if she were well brought out in any fashionable place."

In answer to this I told Lady Katherine that I believed Miss Young was fully appreciated where she dwelt, and was already bespoken by one whom she preferred to all the world.

“Ah! because the poor girl has had no opportunity of forming an opinion on the subject; but perhaps it is as well. And pray who is the fortunate man? Have I ever seen him?”

“Daily, I should think, in and about your present abode. He is the inn-keeper’s son, young Lawson, your brother’s ‘follower,’ of whom you spoke the other day. You see he has shown his refined taste in the choice of a wife, and she fully appreciates him.”

“Well, they will make a very handsome couple,” said Lady Katherine good-naturedly, adding, “I like to see such a well-assorted marriage as that; and they are both quite right to keep in their own rank of life, and not attempt to soar be-

yond it, in consequence of their good looks and superior abilities, or other advantages."

I fully agreed with Lady Katherine, and there the discussion ended.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE news of Lady Rosamond's engagement seemed to hasten the departure of Lord Ashford and his elder daughter. It was quite settled that Lady Helena should be left as before with her little sister, and though it did not appear necessary to consult her wishes on the occasion, I saw she was pleased and satisfied with the family arrangement.

The evening before they left Castleford, Lord Ashford and his daughter asked Dr. Grey and me to dine with them at the Old Inn. We willingly accepted their invitation, and then saw the assembled party for the last time. Lord Ashford was evidently pleased with his daughter's matri-

monial prospects, though it was seldom anything gave him unmitigated satisfaction, therefore, when the subject was mentioned, he dwelt more on the loss of a daughter than on the acquisition of so desirable a son-in-law. I asked Lady Helena, as she sat silently by, if she was acquainted with her future brother-in-law.

“Oh, no, I have never seen him!” she answered, hastily adding—“And I do not suppose I am likely to do so till after—after the wedding, I mean.”

“What makes you say that, Helena?” asked her father, turning suddenly round in the midst of some remark he was making to me on the subject of pears, whilst he was peeling a very fine specimen at dessert.

Helena returned her father's look with one as steady, whilst she answered,

“I heard that this wedding was to take place soon, and therefore I supposed that Daisy would not be strong enough to encounter so much excitement, and con-

cluded that I should remain here with her, as already settled."

"You jump at conclusions rather hastily, young lady," said her father; adding—"but we are not in such a hurry to part with Rosie, nor is she, I imagine, impatient to leave us, so pray remember that I fully expect the pleasure of seeing Daisy at her sister's wedding, and hope for your company also," with a little mocking sort of bow.

Then his lordship turned with a more pleasant expression to me, and said he trusted I would kindly see something of both his daughters during their prolonged residence at the "Castle Inn," and he begged Dr. Grey to take the entire charge of the little invalid, to issue what orders he considered necessary, and to have the goodness to report progress to him two or three times a week till he considered the child could be moved with safety, and return home.

"And by that time, Helena," said Lady

Katherine, "you will, I hope, be ready to encounter an introduction to your new brother, and able and willing to play the *rôle* of bridesmaid; you know it will be necessary that both you and I should appear in that character."

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Lady Helena, in a tone of quiet resignation; "it will be a new experience for us both."

"And, Helena," continued Lady Katherine, who appeared to be in a jesting mood that evening, "if we give you leave to make any acquaintance in Castleford, mind you confine the favour to the prettiest girl I ever saw—except Rosamond, whom she so greatly resembles."

"What do you mean, Kate?" asked her sister, with quiet astonishment.

Lady Katherine, instead of answering, turned to me, saying,

"I should like Helena to see—that Miss Young—I do not want her to call upon her, only, if she should happen to be com-

ing here, as I suppose she does sometimes as the *fiancée* of young Mr. Lawson, perhaps Helena might have a chance of seeing her. The likeness to our Rose is so extraordinary, I should like Helena to see it; besides, the girl herself is so beautiful."

Helena looked up hastily at her sister, saying,

"Whose *fiancée* did you say this girl is?"

Lady Katherine laughed as she answered,

"No one in whom you are concerned—only the inn-keeper's son; but as no doubt you have seen *him*, you will be able to judge whether he is deserving of so much beauty."

"Hardly," answered the girl, shortly, "not having seen the person you describe, and having, I must confess, no particular anxiety to make her acquaintance."

"Don't be affronted, dear," continued

Lady Katherine, in the same tone of *persiflage* which appeared to possess her that evening, and which seemed to annoy her plain matter-of-fact sister, especially as she continued—"You often maintain the natural equality of mankind, and assert the social rights and merits of 'the people,' so I think it will please you to see so fair a specimen of grace and beauty in the middle classes."

"Yes," said Dr. Grey, entering into the spirit of Lady Katherine's observations, "and it must be still more gratifying to know that this beautiful specimen of—not high life, certainly, though still less of low life—is to be fairly matched with another specimen of the opposite sex of equal, if not superior merit."

Lady Katherine laughed, and turning to Dr. Grey, said,

"Are you for us, or against us?"

"Oh, no one," he answered, "can deny that physically your class produces the

highest types of beauty both of form and feature ; no one can fail to see in a really high-bred man or woman that superiority in those respects that we observe amongst all cultivated animals ; the distinctions of race are generally very marked and apparent."

"But," observed Lady Helena, with a slight flush, "there is often as great a want of beauty and grace amongst high-born people as amongst their inferiors in station."

"Nonsense, Helena !" said Lady Katherine. "You often see plain people, I grant you, amongst *us*, but nevertheless we carry the stamp of our race as unmistakably as the lower orders do of theirs, even allowing them sometimes exceptional good looks."

"And yet," persisted her sister, "you grant that this girl you are so much struck with is as beautiful and graceful as our Rosamond, and altogether as lovely a person ?"

"In person, yes," replied Lady Katherine, "but I say nothing about mind or manners, for I only saw her *en passant*, and unless you hear a person speak, you are hardly a judge of the two last important particulars. There is so much in the voice—it tells you at once of refinement or the want of it."

"That applies to manner, and not to mind," said Lady Helena.

"A refined mind will always reflect itself in the manner of its possessor," said Lady Katherine, sententiously.

"Not always," observed Dr. Grey; "for I have known men of most cultivated and refined minds, yet with brusque and even unpleasant manners."

"Ah, well!" said Lady Katherine, lightly, "there are exceptions to every rule. Come, shall we go into the other room?"

As we walked out of the dining-room together, Lady Katherine observed, *sotto voce*,

“If I had not come away, Helena would have sat and argued the matter for ever. I hate tearing an idea to tatters in that way.”

I thought Lady Helena *did* seem rather desirous to hear more about this beautiful girl and her engagement to Bertie Lawson, as she afterwards expressed a wish to see her. I told her that must be left to the chapter of accidents, as I could not assist her in any way, as we did not happen to visit, but thought her chances of meeting her any day were quite as good as her sister's, and with that assurance she was fain to rest content.

The next morning saw the departure of Lord Ashford and his eldest daughter. I had taken leave of them the evening before, so did not accompany Dr. Grey when he went early to see his little patient and wish the travellers good-bye. They both sent me kind messages, as to seeing the two girls who were left behind as constantly as

I might find it convenient. I think Lady Katherine was relieved in mind that, as Lady Helena must remain for an indefinite time, she would be in the safe keeping of Dr. Grey and myself, Lord Ashford's injunctions being quite as strict as heretofore about forming any fresh acquaintances. I did not feel particularly flattered by the exemption in my favour. I was well aware that it was the yielding to circumstances which made it so desirable in my case; just as Lady Katherine had been pleased to favour me with her constant society during the brief period of her sojourn at the "Castle Inn"—she sought my company, as I have already said, *faute de mieux*. I felt far more interested in the plain, unattractive Lady Helena than in her more brilliant sister. I had always observed of the latter that when she talked it was ever of herself, her family, or connexions; she never inquired concerning me or mine; she had evidently no interest in any subject

but herself, and seemed to take it for granted that it was a topic of equal importance to others. I felt for the young girl thus thrown again on her own resources, and without any suitable companion. When she first came to Castleford, she had her brother as her companion, and her little sister was an object of constant interest and amusement. The brother was now returned to a tutor, who was preparing him for the Army, and poor little Margaret was in such a critical state that her society was as much a subject of anxiety as of pleasure. Nevertheless, the little lady began daily to progress; she took her illness very calmly, and never asked the cause of it; it seemed to come quite naturally to her, as well as the daily visits of her doctor and the absence of her brother. She made no inquiries after any persons but those she saw daily. She had always been very fond of her sister Helena, who returned her affection with all the warmth

and devotion of a sensitive heart thrown back upon itself.

I often wondered, when the trial-time of a young girl's life came to her, how it would fare with Lady Helena, and what it would be if she failed to inspire the love that she might entertain herself? She was not attractive to strangers, and yet, as I knew her more intimately, I felt, if ever she was loved, it would be with a strong, enduring affection.

Soon after the departure of her father and sister she made some shy advances to an acquaintance with Lucy Lawson. This was permissible, for Lady Katherine had said to her,

“You might get that nice quiet girl to walk out with you. She entirely knows her own place, and would never presume upon your kindness; and I think it would be nicer for you in every way than wandering about alone, when Norris is not able to go with you.”

Lady Helena did not fail to follow her sister's suggestion, and I was pleased to see that my friend Lucy became quite a favourite with Lady Helena. No one was better able to appreciate Lucy, as they became more intimately acquainted, and Lady Helena was charmed to find her favourite theory more than justified in the qualifications she discovered in the inn-keeper's daughter. She told me triumphantly that she had never met with a more satisfactory companion, for Lucy was as well educated as herself, and her superior even in accomplishments, and she was quite certain that nature had never meant to sanction those arbitrary rules which society and civilization had drawn round about them. I would then remind her that, as they *were* fixed when she came into the world, she had better make up her mind to abide by them in a general way, though she might advantageously relax them under certain circumstances.

I wondered whether Lady Helena's *furor* for equality extended itself to the inn-keeper's son as well as daughter, as Bertie Lawson, despite his good looks and other recommendations, had been esteemed too insignificant a person to be included in the list either of Lady Katherine's permissions or prohibitions. I did not hear, however, that Lady Helena made any advances to his acquaintance, though I believe she would, in her shy way, have extended her notice to the old inn-keeper and his buxom wife, had they not, by ignoring her kind intentions in their favour, in great measure frustrated them. I do not think they would either of them have been the happier for the visits of my lord's daughter in their private apartments. But it fell to the lot of the little invalid to bring about a more intimate companionship with the inn-keeper's son than would have been possible under any other circumstances.

It happened that little Lady Margaret

was sitting by the window one dark afternoon in October; she recognized the young man she had so often seen with her brother Lionel. The delicate colour came into the child's face, as she pointed him out eagerly to Mrs. Norris and her sister Helena, and for the first time she asked,

“Where is Lionel?”

The answer was, “Gone back to school.”

Little Margaret looked vexed and disappointed, and almost about to cry, when her nurse, to divert her attention, said she would call to Mr. Lawson, and ask him to bring his pretty drawings into their room to show them to Lady Margaret, if that would please her.

The child caught eagerly at the proposition, and so it came to pass that the young man brought his drawings to show the sick girl, and then made other little sketches to please and pass away the hours of weakness and weariness.

During those hours Helena would often

come and visit me; an instinctive feeling of delicacy made her feel that, in spite of all his perfections, Bertie Lawson was not a person whom she might meet on terms of equality, and as Lady Margaret was to be indulged in every whim that was not hurtful to herself, no one ever thought of interfering with her childish fancy for Bertie's society and the amusement it afforded her.

In process of time the child was sufficiently recovered to take outdoor exercise, and it was then arranged that she was to be drawn out in a little low chair or carriage with a donkey, and was to proceed by slow degrees to the moors, and there enjoy all the benefit of the bracing air by remaining out as long as she felt any pleasure in so doing.

The little lady, having always had rather a strong will of her own, had now become much confirmed in that particular, and it was only Dr. Grey who could exercise any

control over the wayward child. She declared that no one should lead the donkey but Mr. Lawson, and that no one should walk by her carriage except her sister Helena; her nurse, she declared, was too stiff and slow, and she only wanted Helena. So day after day the two set forth to spend hours upon the breezy moors, and pass them as they best might in pleasant intellectual chat. I used sometimes to make a point of going to meet the party, and to save Lady Helena any embarrassment or discomfort she might feel in the enforced companionship, but she generally took the nurse with her, saying, "Daisy might not feel well, and might want her." Yet the poor woman soon grew tired and was obliged to return to the house, whilst little Margaret insisted on her sister's keeping close to her.

I once ventured to make a remark in a very guarded way to Lady Helena, as to the society she was forced to

endure for so many hours to gratify her little sister. She looked rather proudly in my face as I made the remark, and though she flushed a little, answered quietly and calmly,

“ You think young Mr. Lawson is not a proper companion for me because he is the inn-keeper’s son ? but, do you know, I quite forget that when we happen to be talking or discussing any subject of interest (for I cannot see him devoting himself to my poor little sister’s amusement without uttering a word, as we tread the same path in the same pursuit, and with the same purpose). I find Mr. Lawson a perfect gentleman in mind, manners, and appearance ; if it were not so entirely, you may be very sure I should know how to keep my own distance even under the present circumstances. I only hope the beautiful girl you say he is engaged to marry is his equal in every way, and able to appreciate him as she ought to do.”

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE many days had passed, Lady Helena had the desired opportunity of judging how far the “beautiful girl” was likely to be a suitable match for her *protégé*, as Dr. Grey laughingly called Bertie Lawson.

It happened that I was walking with Lady Helena up the High Street of Castleford; she had come to our house about some work she was learning, her visit was an early one, as she wanted to be back by the time her little sister was dressed and came down to her midday dinner, after which time she generally went out for an hour or two. I volunteered to walk back with Lady Helena, and she said she should

be glad of my company through the town.

We were proceeding at a leisurely pace, talking of various things, when she suddenly drew my attention to a lady who was approaching us, asking at the same time,

“Is not that the girl Katherine talked about? She seems very handsome, and I perceive the likeness to my sister Rosamond.”

I had only time to answer, “Yes, it is Alice Young I see,” and Lady Helena to whisper, “Speak to her,” before the young lady came up, and was about to pass with a little bow, when, obedient to my companion's desire, I stopped, and after a brief salutation, inquired after her father. It was fortunate for me that I had that excuse, Mr. Young having been slightly an invalid, and under Dr. Grey's care, on the occasion. It therefore seemed only right and neighbourly in the doctor's wife

to inquire after his well-being, although, as I have said, we did not actually visit, though we were acquainted. Miss Young stopped, as in duty bound, but did not look much pleased at the interruption; however, she answered—

“Oh, thank you, papa is pretty well again—much as usual, I think.” She then glanced furtively at my companion, and seeing who it was, her manner became slightly confused, but soon recovering herself, she assumed something of a *non-chalant* air, which did not sit easily upon her; and then, as she did not attempt to move on, I remarked that the weather was fine for her father’s getting about again (having nothing of more interest to say to her). To this Alice responded—

“Yes, luckily it is so, for papa has to go backwards and forwards to his school duties in all weathers.”

This was said with a little defiant air, and a glance at the patrician young lady,

as much as to say, "You see I am not ashamed of my father's calling; he has to work hard for his bread, ill or well."

Perhaps Lady Helena's quick perception caught the girl's meaning, as she came a little forward and observed,

"I think we are likely to have a continuance of this fine weather," and then she added, as if she wished to establish a little community of feeling between them—"I find the air on the moors so fine and bracing; my little sister enjoys the beautiful weather there so much, and so do I."

If this little speech, very graciously spoken, was intended to please, it seemed to fail signally in effect. Alice Young only drew up her fine tall figure, and looked down on small, short Lady Helena with a steady gaze whilst she spoke; then, at the conclusion, the girl said, rather abruptly,

"My father has not much time for walking on moors, or the enjoyment of beautiful weather anywhere."

Lady Helena seemed perplexed at this ungracious reception of her intended civilities, and I could see she fancied the girl, being unused to society, was awkward and perhaps, like herself, a little shy. However, being so much the superior in rank, she considered the advances ought to come from herself, and she continued, in a gracious tone—

“Ah, indeed, that is a pity; air and exercise are essential to everybody. You should not let your father fag so hard. Why don't you make him take a little walk on the lovely moors? I go there every day with my little invalid sister.”

“So I hear,” was all the reply vouchsafed to this little intimation; and then I thought we might have walked on, but the two girls, so widely dissimilar in every respect except age, seemed to find some spell cast over them, which compelled them to prolong the very unsatisfactory interview. It was Lady Helena who again

spoke, and this time with far more appearance of embarrassment in her tone and manner than was perceptible in that of the beautiful girl who still stood opposite to her.

"Yes, I daresay you have heard all about us, and my poor little sister's terrible accident, from our friends at the Inn. Lucy is a great ally of mine."

"Very likely," said Alice, still unbending and unsympathising; "but I hear very little from that source. The Lawsons are not in the habit of discussing the concerns of their *customers*!"

Lady Helena looked quite discomfited at this rebuff, and the apparent determination of her new acquaintance to keep on her own low ground, and to drag her old friends after her, leaving Lady Helena on her high pinnacle in solitary grandeur, and there to remember that she could have nothing in common with the Lawsons of the Inn, or the beautiful girl who was, she

supposed, soon likely to become one of themselves.

If it was Alice Young's uncharitable wish to make the high-born lady feel uncomfortable, I am sure that success crowned her efforts. I was just about to propose that we should move on, when, looking towards Miss Young, to catch her eye, and make a parting bow, I saw a bright colour rush all over her face, till it was almost painful in its intensity, and her eyes turned from us to the wide street, where a single horseman, well mounted, and of gentlemanly appearance, was slowly passing near where we stood. A single glance showed me it was Bertie Lawson. He had not observed us at first, but as soon as he saw of whom the group of ladies was composed, he looked surprised for a moment, and then turned his horse's head towards the pavement.

I was rather glad that he should have the opportunity of observing Lady Helena's

kind notice of his intended, feeling sure he would receive it in a better spirit than Alice herself had thought fit to do. No doubt, I imagined, at that time, it was the spirit of Yorkshire independence asserting itself in that young lady's mind, and refusing, as she supposed, to be either patronized or condescendingly acknowledged by the high-born young lady.

Bertie got off his horse, and with the bridle on his arm, lifting his hat, advanced to Lady Helena, and almost ignoring his *fiancée*, as well as myself, said,

"Your ladyship will think I am playing truant to-day, but I beg to assure you I shall be back again in time for Lady Margaret's drive. I am only going a mile or two from here to see the first meet of the hounds this year, but shall not follow, or indeed stay beyond a few minutes after they find. Good morning, Alice. I hope your father is better," seeming suddenly to remember the existence of the young lady,

and the illness of her father, whilst he lingered for a moment to receive her answer. It came in a low, reproachful tone from trembling lips, and a face as blanched as it had been deeply coloured a moment before.

“When you have time and inclination to come and see my father, you will know how he is. In the meantime I don’t think it signifies much.” And she turned round, and walked quickly away in an opposite direction.

Her speech was only audible to me (who stood nearer to her than Lady Helena) and to her lover. He only slightly raised his handsome eyebrows, as if in astonishment at her petulance, and then, with a gracious bow to me, and another respectful glance at Lady Helena, he mounted his handsome bay horse, and walked leisurely down the street.

Lady Helena watched his retreating figure for a second, and then observed,

"Mr. Lawson sits a horse as well as he does everything else!"

"Yes," I replied, mockingly, "we ought all to be very proud of him; such an Admirable Crichton is an honour to Castleford and all belonging to the place."

"Yes, I think so too," said Lady Helena, seriously. "When you see a man who in every way asserts the nobility of nature over that of descent, it must be gratifying to every well-wisher of his or her species."

I kept my little laugh to myself, and I only asked—

"I hope, Lady Helena, that your sympathies have been equally satisfied in regard to the young lady you were so desirous of seeing; she is very handsome, is she not?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lady Helena, candidly; "but she is not a pleasant girl. I admire her, but think her disagreeable."

"Yes, certainly, Alice did not show to much advantage to-day. I think she wished

to impress you with an idea of her perfect independence."

"But why should she do that? I never doubted it," said poor Lady Helena, rather puzzled.

"It is pride, all pride, that takes the very common garb of humility," I replied, with scant charity.

"Ah! I see," said Lady Helena, musing. "But it is all the fault of the upper classes—perhaps I should say the Upper Ten; they are generally so afraid of any encroachment on their rights and privileges that those below them in the social scale meet their advances (even if made in perfect sincerity) with doubt and suspicion, taking refuge in their own feelings of pride and independence."

To this I answered nothing, for it was not a subject that interested me greatly, and had never been one of constant consideration and debate as in Lady Helena's mind, so we walked on in silence, broken

only by an occasional remark on any passing object.

As we reached the Inn, I proposed to take leave and turn back, but Margaret was anxiously watching for her sister at the window, and seeing me with her, opened it and called to me to come in and lunch with them, and Lady Helena seconding the motion, I was obliged to obey. We found the child in a great state of excitement, her eyes were shining and her cheeks flushed, and she exclaimed, as soon as we came into the room,

“It is too bad of you, Helena, to run away all the morning, and that wicked Mr. Lawson has ridden away, and here I am left quite alone—no one to come and amuse me in any way. I am sure Dr. Grey would be very angry; do tell him all about it, Mrs. Grey. I have had no dinner, and now I shall have no drive this afternoon; there is no one to lead my donkey.”

Happily, before dinner was quite over,

the fractious young lady descried her friend riding past the window, and forthwith became pacified, whilst Helena, though rather tired with her long morning's walk, prepared to follow her sister's "chariot wheels."

"It is a great tax on you, Lady Helena," I observed, as I prepared to walk home.

"Oh, I don't mind it," said she, cheerily, "and the poor darling does enjoy her little drives so much;" and really, as I looked at Lady Helena, it did seem to me as if she did also enjoy her walks on the moors as much as little Margaret did her drives.

Sometimes Lucy went with them, and one day after one of these excursions, Lucy came to see me, and after we had sat together a little time, she asked, with some hesitation, whether Dr. Grey thought Lady Margaret improving, and whether she would soon be well enough to be moved.

I asked in return whether she and her family were getting tired of their long

stay at their house, adding that I thought Lady Helena such a very amiable, unassuming person that she could be no trouble in a house.

"Oh, no," said Lucy, "no trouble—none at all, and my father is only too glad to be of use to the old family; but," and then she hesitated again before she said, "I could sometimes wish that Lady Helena were a little more assuming, she so entirely ignores her own place and position that it makes me fear others do not at all times remember it—that they may forget it too."

"Who do you mean by *others*, Lucy?" I asked.

"Well—please do not say anything about my foolish fancies—for I have no doubt they *are* all fancies—but it is Bertie I mean; Lady Helena is so kind, and talks to him so entirely as an equal, that I begin to fear lest he should think himself so too. You know Lady Helena is apt to talk a

little nonsense sometimes about equality and the natural nobility inherent in some people, which may be partly true or not I never took the trouble of inquiring; I only know that whilst we live in the world we must recognise the distinctions that seem to have been intended from the earliest ages, and we shall only come to grief if we endeavour to uproot all the distinctions of society, and I daresay as Lady Helena grows older and mixes more in her own world, she will acknowledge it too."

"What would you have her do, Lucy?" I asked, adding—"For we cannot change her sentiments, such as they are, and I hope your brother is too sensible and well-informed a man to be infected by them in any way."

"I hope so too," said Lucy; "but I went to see Alice the other day, for she never comes here now, and I found her very cool to me at first, and then she seemed very miserable, and told me after much pressing

and inquiry that Bertie had lately become very cool and changed to her and hardly ever came to see her."

This intelligence roused me to a recollection of our meeting with Alice Young and her strange behaviour, but as for its proceeding from jealousy, and that of a person so entirely out of her lover's rank of life, appeared to me too monstrous, and almost too absurd, to be entertained seriously for a moment. I almost laughed as I asked Lucy,

"Why, my dear child, what ridiculous notions has that foolish girl Alice Young been putting into your head?—she made herself extremely disagreeable to Lady Helena when she kindly spoke to her in the street the other day. Can she really indulge in such a preposterous idea as that your brother Bertie should dream of looking upon Lady Helena Elmsley in any other light than as Lord Ashford's daughter, between whom and him there is as much social distinction

as—as——” and there I stopped for want of a fitting simile, as I did not wish to say anything more disagreeable than I could avoid. Lucy heard me, and was not offended ; her plain, good sense showed the absurdity of the supposition, and yet she shook her head and said,

“Poor Alice ! she is half distracted, and very angry also ; Lady Helena, too, is so very plain, and Alice so beautiful that——”

“Hush, hush, Lucy !” I exclaimed. “How can you bring the two together in such a comparison for such a far-fetched imagination ? And poor Lady Helena, so kind to you and partial to you, as I know she is—liking both you and your brother for the same reason—that you are both persons of cultivated minds and more than ordinary accomplishments !”

“It is a great pity she does like us,” replied Lucy, with quiet decision, but, as I thought, rather unamiable perversity, “and I am sure my mother thinks the

same, though my father is deaf and blind to everything that any of *the family* may please to say or do."

I had never seen gentle Lucy so ruffled before. I had sometimes thought her rather hard upon her brother, and not sufficiently alive to his perfections, though she had always been a submissive and affectionate sister in her girlhood, and he had sometimes treated her rather imperiously as a natural consequence; but of late years, since her engagement and the trouble that followed, she had been less subservient to him, and I knew that in the matter of his implied engagement to Alice Young she had often blamed him for trifling with her affections, though she thoroughly believed in his real attachment to her.

After Lucy's little outbreak, she seemed to recollect herself, and said she was sorry she had vexed me, but that she was a good deal worried in mind, and hardly

knew what was best to do. I treated the whole thing very lightly—as, indeed, I could not but consider it—yet I thought, if it were possible, and I had the opportunity, I would give a word of caution to Lady Helena.

CHAPTER X.

I DID not find it so easy to make the opportunity I desired. It was a delicate and difficult undertaking, and I felt that a word spoken unadvisedly might do far more harm than good. I said nothing even to my husband on the subject. I thought he might regard Lucy's communication as mere woman's tattle, and desire me to leave the matter alone. I was in some measure reassured by his telling me at this time that he was about writing to Lord Ashford to inform him he considered his little patient sufficiently recovered to bear the journey home, and if his lordship liked to arrange it, he thought the little girl might with safety travel the next

week. I was glad to hear this, though rather sorry to lose sight of Lady Helena, whom I liked very much, in spite of the various crude opinions she was in the habit of airing for my special benefit.

Lord Ashford's reply soon came, expressing satisfaction at the report, but saying he must defer his daughter's return another fortnight, as he was about leaving home with his two elder daughters on a visit to Sir Archibald Cameron's place, and as he should be absent at the time named by Dr. Grey for the return of his younger ones, he wished them to remain where they were till he came home himself, as his little girl would still continue under Dr. Grey's care, and have the benefit of that and the fine air, which seemed to suit her so well, &c., &c.

I rather regretted this postponement on Lady Helena's account; however, I thought I would join their walking parties for the ensuing fortnight as often as I could with

convenience to myself on account of many other demands on my time.

One especially fine afternoon towards the end of October, I set out about the time I knew I should meet the party from the Inn taking their daily walk and drive, and on reaching the wide extent of moors, was not disappointed in my expectations. They had proceeded about a quarter of a mile from the "Castle Inn" when I first saw them, and being immediately recognised by the whole party, they turned and met me.

When I first saw them, Lucy was walking by the side of the little girl's chair, her brother, as usual, took charge of the donkey that drew it, and Lady Helena hovered between the two, more frequently becoming so absorbed in some discussion with Bertie as to forget the existence of Lucy. I had observed this state of things before, and it struck me forcibly that day.

The whole party seemed in excellent

spirits, and on the best terms with each other, though I fancied I detected an uneasy expression on Lucy's countenance every time Lady Helena left her side to talk to her brother. Lady Margaret was in high spirits, the result of returning health and strength, and at that time of pleasurable occupation. She called me to the other side of her chair to inform me they were going such a charming expedition, more than a mile further on. It was to see an old servant of Mrs. Lawson's, and she had such loads of nice things for her, and she had got them all in a basket in her carriage, and was going to unpack them and give them to her herself.

I knew very well, then, the direction in which they were bound, as I had before now walked with Lucy to see old Hester Eccles. She was an old woman who had lived in the Lawson family all her life, and I believe her family before her. She herself had been Mr. Lawson's housekeeper

in his bachelor days, her husband also being employed in and about the Inn. They both remained in their places after Mr. Lawson's marriage, and Hester took charge as nurse of both Mrs. Lawson's children. She had become a widow since that time, and Mr. Lawson had given her a cottage on his own land, and a small pension (supplemented by constant gifts), on which the old woman existed very comfortably.

Lucy and her brother, as well as their parents, had an affectionate regard for Hester Eccles, and Lady Margaret expressed herself very desirous of making the acquaintance of "Miss and Mr. Bertie Lawson's old nurse." So we went on our pleasant way that lovely day, and I remembered thinking that Helena looked almost pretty, with the soft colour the exercise and pleasant conversation had brought into her sallow face lighting up her large dark eyes, then bright with ani-

mation. It was a perfect transformation from the dull, listless expression her countenance had worn when I first saw her in Castleford Church.

I observed, on the present occasion, nothing could be quieter or more gently ladylike than her manner and conversation. Neither did young Lawson ever seem to presume upon her gentle condescension, though he was as self-possessed as ever, and independent in manner and conversation. Surely, I thought, Lucy could see nothing to blame in either. I was glad I had come, for I fancied my presence was like the "missing link" between the two parties.

Thus we rambled on, chatting and discoursing of many things seen and unseen, gathering wild flowers (now becoming very scarce), and collecting feathers dropped on the moors by the wild birds in their flights across them. There was a spirit of quiet but heart-felt enjoyment in all around. Helena

took an opportunity of whispering to me that she was glad her father had extended their leave of absence.

“But you will be glad, I should think, Lady Helena, to return home?” I observed, by way of reminder. She answered,

“I suppose I ought to be, but I always feel I am not wanted there; even Daisy will care less about me when she has the others, and just now, in all the bustle and excitement of this marriage, there will be nothing but new people, new dresses, new everything—all show and society! Oh, how different from this sweet, quiet, lovely scene; and how rare it is to find so much goodness and high cultivation as are united in these unsophisticated people!”

“No doubt when you return home you will find other things just as pleasant in a fresh set of people, and you must remember amongst those to whom by birth and education you belong.”

“Ah, birth is a mere accident! and I

am sure must have been a mistake in my case. I am so happy here; this is the idyl of my life, I shall always look back upon it with affectionate longing."

I said nothing about her coming again, for I saw no chance of it, neither did it seem to me very desirable that she should do so. Our talk was interrupted by Daisy calling, and in much excitement, that the cottage was in view; and she was sure it was a lovely little place, and she should not mind staying there for a change herself, and she wondered if Mrs. Eccles saw them coming; how glad she must be, and surprised to see such a large party, adding,

"Oh, there she is, coming to meet us; but it must be her daughter, it could not be Mrs. Eccles, because she was so old!"

As Margaret's voluble speech ended, no one seemed inclined to take up the parable, for we had reached the cottage and the door was thrown wide open and a lady appeared

on the threshold. Certainly it was *not* old Hester herself, for the apparition was young, beautiful, and graceful, and looked so, in spite of the almost defiant attitude it assumed as the donkey-chair, with its attendants, halted just in front of her, almost obstructing her exit from the house.

"Alice," exclaimed Lucy, who was the first to speak, "who would have thought of seeing you here?"

The young lady only acknowledged her greeting and that of the party with a slight contemptuous bow, and retorted,

"I cannot tell what *you* thought, but I know that *I* never dreamt of seeing *you* here."

"No," said Lucy, still the spokesman (or woman) of our small party, "I suppose not, but if we *had* known we might have come together."

"As we *used* to do!" said Alice, in a

bitter, ironical tone, but with a latent expression of despair on her young face that was sad to see. "But pray do not let me stop you and your lady-friends ; I am going, so shall not interrupt the enjoyment of your party in any way."

During this slight skirmish, Lady Helena had stood rather aloof, and Bertie had occupied himself in adjusting something about the donkey's harness ; he now turned and held out his hand to the indignant girl, saying,

"Good-bye, Alice ; we won't try to stop you now, as these ladies are come to see old nurse, and I am sure it is very kind of you to have been visiting her also ; it is quite a gay day for the old lady."

I observed the quick look of reproach and indignation that Alice cast upon her faithless lover as she spurned his hand away and repeated his last words.

"A gay day ! Yes, I daresay you find

it very gay ; but I can see nothing gay myself." And the poor girl turned away, and went down the little hill on which the cottage stood at a quick pace, and was soon lost to view.

For myself, I felt vexed for Alice, and annoyed at the whole scene, and most dissatisfied with the young man, who, perfectly cool and collected, began to help Lady Margaret out of the carriage, and to collect the various articles they had brought with them for the old woman. Lucy meanwhile had gone into the house, and was preparing Hester for her new visitors. Daisy looked after Miss Young's retreating figure, and whispered to Bertie,

"What is the matter? Is she angry with us, or with you?"

"With both, I think," answered the young man, in an indifferent tone. And then Lady Helena came up to him and said, in a low voice,

"I am so sorry if we have been the

cause of any little misunderstanding between you. For I know *who* she is, and *what* she is to you. Perhaps she thinks you have been remiss in devoting so much of your time to my poor little sister. I am so sorry. Pray run after her and make it up."

Bertie Lawson raised his dark eyes to Helena, and said,

"*Impossible!* You are all goodness, all condescension, to concern yourself about my unhappy affairs. But you have just had a specimen of Miss Young's unfortunate temper. But for *that* I *might* have been in the relation to her you suppose."

"But you are, or have been, engaged to her?" questioned Lady Helena, in all simplicity.

"*Never!*" answered the young man, with cool determination in his voice, and in the set expression of his handsome features. "I might have been, for we have been intimate from children, and her family

wished it, and so did mine, and—and I believe she liked me in her weak, wilful way, but it can never be *now*.”

Young Lawson seemed quite to forget himself, and his position in regard to his listener, besides casting aside all recollection of past vows of lasting affection to the poor girl whom he was now maddening with his cruel, heartless neglect. Nor did Lady Helena seem to think there was anything misplaced in the rapt attention with which she heard his confession of faithlessness. They were both so engrossed that they had neither ears nor eyes for little Margaret, who had called me to her side, and had claimed my assistance in some trifling matter, whilst the other two talked on, regardless of us both.

“What you tell me is very sad,” said Helena, in a gentle tone. “Everyone said you and Miss Young were so happily suited to each other, and she is so beautiful!”

Bertie repeated the word, "*beautiful*" with an accent of contempt.

"No, do not call her beautiful. She has regular features, and a fine complexion, but what of that? There was a time I did admire her in a way, but what is perfection of feature, with a weak, distorted mind and an overbearing temper? I can see no real beauty in such a case, whilst I could worship a less beautiful face, illumined with every perfection of mind, of goodness, of gentleness, and every womanly attribute. It is rare to meet with such, but, to my surprise, I find such perfection *does* exist; and that is my idea of real beauty!"

Lady Helena for the first time looked a little startled and embarrassed, whilst I felt enraged and indignant at the young man's falsehood and audacity, and determined to put an end to his "*confessions*." I therefore said,

"Are you ready to go into the cottage,

Lady Helena? Your sister says she has collected all her parcels, and wishes to go in with you."

Lady Helena started at the sound of my voice, and seemed rather glad of the interruption, as she said,

"Oh, I have been ready these ten minutes. I beg your pardon for having kept you waiting. Come, Daisy, we will go in together, and introduce each other."

She took Margaret's hand as she spoke, and without another word either to me or Mr. Lawson, entered the cottage.

We were all glad to rest there for an hour or so, and old Hester seemed delighted to have such "*grand company*," as she called the two young ladies, and to be allowed to make tea for them, besides her two pet nurslings, for whom she still cherished the most unbounded love and admiration, especially for Bertie, whom she loudly pronounced to be "the finest and handsomest young man that ever

stepped ;” but I saw she annoyed him by talking of the visit she had just had from his “bonny lady-love,” and telling him that she knew Miss Alice only came to see her that she might hear her talk about all that Master Bertie did when he was little, and how, when he was bigger, he brought all the prizes home from school, and after that, how everyone said he was the first hand at cricket and best rider in all that side of the country, adding,

“And I told her, the pretty lady, as she sat and listened so pleased, that I knew Master Bertie would have the fairest bride too (as well he ought to) in all the country.”

“Pray stop, Hester ; you can tell these ladies something more interesting than all that nonsense. Why, you have often said how you remembered all the fine doings when the Earl (Lord Ashford’s father) came of age, and how you went to see them all, and how grand the old Castle

looked at night in the light of the bonfires upon the hill above. Come, tell us all about that."

It was a happy diversion, and turned the old woman's thoughts into long-past scenes ; and as she dwelt upon them, Lady Margaret seemed greatly amused, and asked innumerable questions. I observed that Lady Helena sat very silent and abstracted, only occasionally addressing some gracious remark to Mrs. Eccles, and kindly partaking of the tea to please her. I had not much to say myself, for my heart felt sad for the young girl who had just turned homewards with a wounded and indignant spirit. I felt sure she had gone to visit the Lawsons' old nurse (whom she knew very well) on purpose to hear her talk of Bertie and all his perfections, little expecting to meet him and his new friends there that evening. Her temper might have been in fault, no doubt, but it was sorely tested by her lover's cruel in-

difference and studied neglect. I felt glad to take my leave as soon as the party left the cottage, and we each took our way home in separate directions.

CHAPTER XI.

I COULD not keep silence any longer, and relieved my mind by telling my husband that evening all that had been said and done in my afternoon ramble, and what were my doubts and fears on the occasion. Dr. Grey listened with attention to my recital, but I fancied received it with a shade of incredulity, not as to facts, but as to the proper interpretation of them. He almost laughed at the notion of old Mark Lawson's son being mad enough to make love to Lord Ashford's daughter, and at the very idea of that young lady's being also demented sufficiently to listen to his suit, observing in conclusion,

“I daresay you will say such instances

have occurred of high-born dames condescending to men of low estate ; but I do not think you need have any fear in this case, young Lawson is a shrewd, clever fellow in every way, and he is no doubt a little set up by the notice he generally receives from Lady Helena under present circumstances, for she is not very wise in some respects, though well-informed on many others, and she has her hobby which it pleases her to mount whilst here, and the young man ventures to offer his compliments, seeing she is, like our gracious Queen Bess of ancient memory, always ready to receive and appreciate them, and in Lady Helena's case the more so because she is not likely to receive many elsewhere."

" But what do you say to his cruelty to the girl he used to loved and was supposed to be engaged to ?" I asked.

" Oh, only a lover's quarrel, and I fancy from what I saw and heard whilst attending Miss Young's father that this is not

the first by any means they have had ; she, like the young man, has also been rather spoilt, and is of an exacting temper and high spirit—ready to go through fire and water for those she loves, but easily provoked and prone to display her anger, and he takes this way of revenging and punishing her, for they seem to have been at variance for some little time, but no doubt they both really care for each other, and it will all come right in the end, especially if no one interferes between them with the idea of setting matters right, as I imagine that amiable little goose Lucy would like to do.”

“How do you know that ?” I questioned, feeling considerably relieved in my mind by Dr. Grey’s view of the case I had submitted to his judgment.

“Oh, I don’t tell the secrets of my patients—even to you ; but I have none to tell in this case, only I perceived the drift of some observations Miss Lucy let fall

concerning her brother and Alice Young, when I was last at the Inn, and I just told her not to meddle with what did not concern her, and I give you, my dear, the same advice."

And there the conversation ended, for I found there was nothing for me to do but to sit quiet and let matters take their course. I observed, however, that Dr. Grey, after that time, put a stop to the long afternoon wanderings on the moor; he said the days were getting chilly, and he wished his little patient to have a drive in an open carriage into the country instead of the donkey-chair, and recommended that Lady Helena and Mrs. Norris should accompany her, and that being the case, there was no further excuse for Mr. Bertie's attendance, so that source of anxiety was at an end.

There was only a week remaining now of the time the two young ladies were to stay at Castleford, so I hoped that short

period might be happily tided over without any fresh cause for alarm or suspicion. However, it happened that such was not fated to be the case, and a more serious disturbance arose from an entirely unexpected quarter.

A few mornings after our conversation, Dr. Grey, looking over the directions of his numerous letters preparatory to opening them, observed, as he took up a bulky-looking epistle,

“I see I have got a letter from Lord Ashford this morning, and, judging from its thickness, a lengthy communication—full of directions, I suppose, about his daughters’ journey home next week.”

He opened the letter forthwith, and another enclosed in it fell out. It was directed to the Earl of Ashford, and had been forwarded to him from his own house in Scotland (to which it was directed) to the place belonging to Sir Archibald Cameron, where he was then on a visit.

My husband made no remark, only laid the letter to Lord Ashford on the breakfast-table, and proceeded to read that written by his lordship to himself. The letter was very brief, and contained only these words—

“MY DEAR SIR,—Have the goodness to look over the enclosed document and tell me if you have the slightest notion whence it comes, or for what purpose it is written, and whether you consider the writer to be mad or a fool, or both.—Yours sincerely,

“ASHFORD.”

Dr. Grey then turned to the enclosed letter, took it out of its envelope, and read :

“One who wishes well to the ancient house of Ashford, writes these few lines to its respected head, to warn him that the family honour is likely to be endangered by the longer residence of some of its members at the old ‘Castle Inn’ at Castleford.”

There was neither date nor signature—a stupid anonymous letter to all intents and purposes. I waited silently for some remark from my husband; he looked up at last with a smile and said,

“Well, you see the bubble has burst; but I think it contains nothing more dangerous than a few drops of water.”

“Who can have written it? and what do you mean to do?”

“Just nothing at all, and shall tell Lord Ashford to put it into the fire, as I should always treat any anonymous communication sent to me.”

“But supposing there *is* something in it all? and the writer wishes to warn Lord Ashford, and is really anxious to prevent any mischief happening?”

“What sort of mischief do you apprehend, my dear? an engagement between Bertie Lawson and Lady Helena Elmsley? Well, I have too good an opinion of both to think either could dream of such a pre-

posterous piece of folly. However, I must go and pay my daily visit to the little Lady Margaret, and see whether it is her or her sister that is suspected of a design on the family honour of the house of Ashford, or how, and in what way, they are likely to compromise it." Then, observing I still looked serious, and could not see things as lightly as he did, he added, "Do not distress yourself on this account; some foolish, ignorant person has written the letter, hoping to produce a sensation; or perhaps supposing that, if a young lady chooses to talk to a young man in an inferior position of life, evil must come of it. I can really see nothing more serious in the whole affair, having a very fair opinion of Lady Helena's mind and morals."

"I never thought to question either," I answered, "but some one from this place must have written this, though I see it is posted from London. Who can it be?"

"I should be sorry to suspect anyone I

know of the basest action that can be committed in civilized society, so I will not waste time in vain conjectures; but as you still seem uneasy, suppose you put on your bonnet and walk up to the Inn with me, as I am going there on my professional visit of daily inspection, and you can make one of friendship at the same time, and see if you can detect any wrong symptoms about Lady Helena, or anyone else in the Inn."

I was glad to follow this suggestion, and we soon set out, walking up the long street that led to the Inn, and to the moor beyond, and talking of everything except that which so fully occupied my mind.

When we reached our destination, I walked at once to Lady Helena's room, and found both the girls and their old servant busily occupied. They seemed to be collecting all their scattered goods preparatory to their departure. Daisy appeared in high glee, and perfectly restored health

and spirits. Springing over a heap of books and music that lay collected on the floor, she rushed up to me, exclaiming,

“Such good news, Mrs. Grey. Papa has sent for us home in such a hurry, and I am sure Dr. Grey need not feel my pulse to-day, for I am as strong as—as the dear donkey that used to drag me about so long—how I shall miss his dear long ears, and how I shall miss him—and Bertie Lawson.”

“Come, come, Lady Margaret, my dear, how you do run on with your donkeys, and all your doings, and I am sure Dr. Grey will say, if you put yourself in such a flurry and fuss, you will never be able to start the day after to-morrow.”

“Come, we will see about that,” said the doctor. “Let me look at this little lady a little nearer. Well, I can’t say I see anything at all the matter with her. She may travel safely as soon as Lord Ashford likes to have her. You know I said she might do so a fortnight ago; and now, as you

seem so busy, I shall say good-bye, and I will come and see you off the day after to-morrow." And then Dr. Grey shook hands with both the young ladies, and took his departure.

I remained behind, on a sign from Lady Helena. She looked worried and dejected, but said she wanted to talk to me, and then took me into the room which served as their dining-room, and observed,

"This is very sudden."

I said I supposed it was, but perhaps her father and sisters were returning home sooner than they intended.

"No, I wish they were," said Helena, with a sigh. "Papa wishes us to join them at Sir Archibald Cameron's place; that gentleman is very anxious to make our acquaintance, so we are to go there first, and then home together, I don't know when. Oh! how I shall hate it!"

"I hope not," I said, hardly knowing what to say.

“But that is not what I wanted to say to you, Mrs. Grey. I have such a strange letter from Katherine. I cannot tell what she means, but it seems, as far as I can understand, that some one has been writing to my father about me, and saying all sorts of ill-natured things. Now I want you to help me to find out who this person can be, and with what object he can have written. What do you think?”

I told her very truly it was quite impossible for me to conjecture, and if ill-natured letters had been sent, I was as far as she could be from guessing who the writer was, as I supposed she must allude to some anonymous letters. Yes, she supposed they must be anonymous, though she had never seen such a letter in her life. Katherine did not tell her exactly what was said, “Only,” said poor Helena, with tears in her eyes—“only she supposed I must have been committing myself

in talking my usual amount of nonsense, and upholding my folly by rushing into friendship with some queer acquaintances and intimacies that had attracted the notice of people always on the watch for the back-slidings of their superiors, which had caused this curious epistle to be fired off at my poor father's head. Now," she continued, "I have not seen this horrible letter, so have no idea what is in it, and you are my witness, Mrs. Grey, that I have not made, or wished to make, a single new acquaintance since papa and Kate went away, so what can the person have to say against me and my associates?"

As Lady Helena paused, and looked anxiously in my face, I felt suddenly impelled to say,

"Forgive me, dear Lady Helena, but people not knowing the circumstances might think in your constant walks on the moor, seeing Mr. Bertie Lawson often in earnest conversation with you, that he was

not a fit companion for a young lady in your high position."

I repented myself as soon as I had said this, for a deep crimson flush rose up in the girl's face, and her dark eyes flashed as she looked at me with more of the pride of her race than I had ever seen displayed in it before, and replied—

"And was that *your* opinion too, Mrs. Grey?"

I hardly knew what to answer, for I had never witnessed the slightest display of passion or resentment in her calm, even manner, but now she seemed possessed by a new feeling, and she slightly stamped her foot as she exclaimed—

"You must answer me—I have a right to know—if my conduct is to be commented upon, I must know the grounds!"

I answered, perhaps rather evasively,

"I only said what *might* appear to strangers, and what perhaps I might have thought myself, only I am aware that

peculiar circumstances brought about the companionship, and also that I am quite aware that young Mr. Lawson is an exceptional person for his station in life, a young man extremely well educated, and of superior attainments in every way; and I know also, Lady Helena, that in your admiration of genius and talent, you do not consider the station of the person who may happen to own them."

As I said this, Lady Helena's brow relaxed, a softer expression stole over her face, and, after a moment's pause, she answered,

"I suppose you are right; no doubt the possessor of such rare endowments as Mr. Bertie Lawson must expect to be misunderstood, envied, and maligned, whilst I, for simply showing my respect for talent, and acknowledging its superiority to the accident of rank, may also expect to be equally misunderstood and misrepresented. If that is all, I am content to abide any

censure, anonymously or more honestly expressed ; but"—and then all her pride and passion seemed to evaporate as she added—"you cannot imagine how distasteful this change of plans is to me. I shall hate going to this new grand place, full of strangers, and all sorts of bustle and gaiety, and I do not want to see my new brother-in-law before I am obliged, and I am sure, when he sees me, he will not care about me. I wish I might go home with Norris, who, I understand, is only to stay a day or two. I think I shall try to escape then. If people would but have let me alone, this would never have happened, and I should have stayed on with Daisy at dear Castleford till the appointed time."

I was sorry for Lady Helena, and could only advise her to make the best of her position in life, and the peculiar duties and obligations it involved. She answered me, sorrowfully,

“Yes, that would be all very well for some people—my handsome sisters, for instance, but you do not know—you cannot realise *my* position at home.”

I was quite sure that half her trouble was the result of a morbidly sensitive imagination; but the trouble was just as real at that time, and I could not hope to remove it, it must be left to time and life's experience to show how fanciful it was. So we parted without further remonstrance from me on the subject.

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS fated to assist at another mysterious conference that morning, being quite as unable to unravel the design of the one as the other. As I was crossing the wide hall of the Inn (formerly a spacious manor-house), after leaving Lady Helena's apartment, I saw my friend Lucy waylaying me, and, obedient to her request, I followed her into her own room and prepared myself to listen to another confidential communication.

“Well, Lucy, what is it?” I asked, observing her face of consternation and eyes round with suppressed intelligence. Lucy only replied to my question by asking another, which was,

“Pray, Mrs. Grey, do tell me—have you ever had—have you ever seen an anonymous letter?”

To this I replied that I had certainly seen such a production (witness that same morning), but that happily no one had ever thought it worth his while to send me one.

“Oh, are not they horrible things?” said Lucy.

“Very much so; but have you been assailed in that way?”

“No, but my father received one this very day—such a dreadful one! he is half beside himself, for he never saw one before; but my mother says she has seen them when she lived at home, as her father was an Exciseman, and sometimes received anonymous communications.”

I then asked Lucy if she was at liberty to tell me the purport of Mr. Lawson's letter that morning.

“Oh yes, for my father said he should

show it to Dr. Grey and ask him if he could tell what it all meant." (Just like Lord Ashford, thought I to myself.) "It began with telling my father that he had always passed for an honest man all his life, and the writer believed him to be such, but it would be a pity for him to forfeit that character in his old age in the eyes of the world by his connivance at conduct on the part of one very near to him, which threatened the honour and happiness of an ancient and noble house, and if persevered in, would redound to his own utter confusion and condemnation; that was all," said poor Lucy, trembling with agitation and annoyance, and then adding—"I was at no loss to guess the underhand meaning; of course, it alluded to Bertie and Lady Helena."

I quite started to hear the subject so familiarly handled, and that Lucy should persist in uniting the two in her thoughts—it is true I had done so myself, but still it

was more in deprecation of the idea than with any actual conviction of its reality.

“And did you say so to your father?” I asked.

“Not exactly; but when my father talked of asking Dr. Grey, Bertie looked up (we were all at breakfast) as cool as if there was nothing in it, and said no doubt it had reference to the ladies living in his house. And then,” continued Lucy, “if you had seen my father’s face of blank astonishment as he turned to my mother and asked,

“‘Why, missus, you have not gone and done anything to offend “the Family?”’ For this paper talks of conniving with one very near—that must mean you, Patty, for you are nearer to me than aught else in this world. Surely no one can think that we have taken advantage of such young ladies as those so long under our roof to over-reach or defraud them? But even allowing that (and there is One above

knows how differently I have acted by them in all respects)—but even then, as I say, though it might compromise *my* character (as they say) for honesty, and bring confusion and condemnation on my old shoulders, I don't see how those dear ladies would be likely to suffer in any way except through my lord's pocket.”

“And what did your mother say?”

Lucy answered,

“Well, my mother had much more of an idea what it all meant than my dear, honest, simple-minded father. So mother looked down and played with her spoon, then at last looked up and said,

“‘I don't think they mean *me*, father. Ask Bertie what his opinion is on the subject.’

“Then Bertie looked up, still very cool and very self-satisfied, and said,

“‘My idea is that some meddling ass has been watching the young ladies here out walking, and as I have generally ac-

accompanied them in their walks and drives, the said ass has become envious and jealous of the privilege I have enjoyed, and is disposed to make mischief out of a very simple proceeding.'

" 'But—but,' said my father, 'what dishonour could arise from that?'

" 'None that I can imagine,' said Bertie, as composed as possible; and then my mother spoke, and observed,

" 'Perhaps they might fancy, my dear, as Bertie is so—so comely and so clever, that seeing so much of him—that the elder young lady might take a fancy to him.'

" 'That's about it, I suppose, mother,' said Bertie.

" 'Then father quite jumped up from his chair, as if he could not sit still under such a new aspect of things, and growing very red, he exclaimed,

" 'Did I ever! Well, to be sure! The mean, sneaking villain, to put such notions into honest men's heads. A pretty thing

for my lord to hear! But—no, he is far too noble ever to let such a suspicion darken his mind. And Lady Helena, with all her gracious ways and words, though she is not pretty, she is a real lady, every inch of her, but, ah! my boy, not to be compared in looks with the girl you have chosen! Well, it is a mercy that we all know how the land lies there.'

"I was quite provoked with Bertie," continued Lucy, "for he said nothing whilst my father ran on in this way; he only looked as if he thought he knew the rights of it all much better than father, or any of us. So poor father, thinking it was vexation that kept him so cool and silent, laid his dear old hand on his shoulder, and looking so kindly at him, said,

" 'Don't let this vex you, my boy. The flame that has nothing to feed on will soon go out of itself, and so will this report, if the mean villain that wrote this letter has put it about in other places, and may have

said, in plainer words, that the son of the old inn-keeper, and grandson of the excise-man, has it in his thoughts to go courting the Lord of the Castle's daughter, the daughter of Earls and Dukes, for Lady Helena's mother was a Duke's granddaughter. A pretty pass we must be come to, eh, my son ?'

" 'A man's a man for a' that,' said Bertie, looking up in his father's face with his handsome, laughing eyes.

" 'Ay, my boy, and an honest one, when he keeps in his own place, where Providence has placed him and his forefathers.'

" 'Well, father, you may be right in your generation, and perhaps I am not far wrong in mine when I say I am an advocate for progress and civilization, and I do not see how that is to be attained by a man's standing still for ever in the same spot where his forefathers stood ; but, of course, I am supposing him to be gifted with sense and education to move onwards.

Why, father, if we had all stood still where our forefathers were centuries past, you would be eating acorns, wearing very scant clothing, and running wild in the woods, like the Ancient Britons.'

"Then father answered meekly, as he always does when Bertie comes down upon him with his airs of learning and superiority,

" 'Well, my dear, I can't argue the matter with you, only what you say has been the work of ages, and I reckon it will take some time to make the inn-keeper's son a fit match for the Earl's daughter; but I'm an old fool to talk such rubbish as that.'

"We were all very quiet for some time after, and Bertie got up and looked over some of his fishing-tackle, whistling all the while, as if he had dismissed the subject; but as he came behind my chair, he said, in a low tone to me, who had not spoken at all,

“ ‘A penny for your thoughts, my sister.’

“ I answered, quite carelessly, ‘ On what subject?’

“ He said, ‘ On that last in discussion.’

“ To which I only replied, ‘ My father has said all that I think upon it, so I have nothing to add, for I consider it is too preposterous an idea to talk about.’

“ ‘Thank you for your flattering opinion, my sister; it is lucky some people have a more favourable one.’ And then Bertie lounged out of the room.

“ It was very soon after that Mrs. Norris came in to tell us her young ladies were to leave the day after the next, for they had an invitation to meet their father and sisters at Sir Archibald Cameron’s place, and she was in a great bustle to get things ready in time—would my mother send word to the washerwoman, for she had to look up everything, and get ready for

packing, and much more to the same purpose ; 'so," said Lucy, in conclusion, "I daresay you found the young ladies all in a bustle getting ready for their journey the day after to-morrow. It seems a sudden move, but, I hope, is quite accounted for by the change of plans Mrs. Norris mentioned. Oh ! I only hope and trust nothing of this wretched, presumptuous nonsense may ever come either to Lady Helena's ears or to any of her family's ! What would they think of us all ? It is such a relief to my mind that they are going so soon, though I shall miss them about the house ; and as for Bertie, I fear he will be quite cross, though I daresay he will take refuge at the farm, as he often goes away and stays there when he is out of sorts, or has had a quarrel with Alice, to punish her ; but now I hope they will soon come to a better understanding."

"Yes," said I, "it is to be hoped they

will prove the truth of the old song, which says,

“ ‘On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.’ ”

“ And it must be so easy in this case,” said Lucy, with a sigh, “ as I believe them to be truly and devotedly attached to each other ; but Bertie’s conceit and self-will, and Alice’s temper, have been the cause of sad quarrels between them, and the last, I fear, has been very serious. Still, though Alice is hot-tempered and exacting with those she loves, she is soon appeased, and, I know, loves Bertie far too well to refuse a reconciliation when he seeks it in all sincerity, as I trust he will do now.”

I had nothing to say to this but to express my hope that it might soon be as Lucy desired, and with the absence of the principal cause of offence, that Miss Young and her lover might agree to make up their late quarrels, and live in peace and harmony at least till they entered upon

their married life, when they were only too likely to fall out occasionally.

As Lucy had disburdened her mind and seemed considerably easier in consequence, she suffered me at length to depart, and I regained my own habitation without any further adventures. As I heard the Lady Elmsleys were to leave by an early train for their long journey into Scotland, I settled in my own mind I would go rather late in the afternoon of the preceding day and take leave of my young friends instead of accompanying my husband in his parting visit the morning they left Castleford. I accordingly presented myself at the Inn a little before four o'clock on the eve of their departure. I was shown into the sitting-room which the two girls had occupied so many weeks, and looked round it rather sorrowfully with the conviction that I should see them there no more. We were all young in those days, so certainly there might have been a chance in favour

of seeing some of the party once more ; but as I fancied our pleasant acquaintance was come to an end, I felt depressed as I looked round the dismantled apartment. The servant I had met on entering the house had told me the ladies were upstairs, so I sent word that I was below, and patiently awaited their appearance. In a few minutes Nurse Norris came down rather in a bustle to tell me "the young ladies had gone out, they seemed quite to have set their hearts, poor dears ! on a last look at the moors, so Lady Helena took her sister and went out, saying she would be back soon, and she hoped they would, as the evenings got so chilly and my little lady was not so strong, perhaps, as she had been, but would I wait till they came back ?" I declined doing that, but said I would walk a little way to meet them on their return home, and see them out of doors instead of within.

That settled, and having bid Mrs. Norris

an affectionate farewell, I set off on my further walk and was soon on the track I knew they must come by; I was not disappointed, for presently the persons whom I was in search of came in view. I saw Helena and her sister Daisy, but—they were not alone, and as I came nearer, immediately recognized in their attendant cavalier young Lawson; certainly no one meeting the trio, and looking at them in that cursory way, would have been struck with anything incongruous in the appearance of the party. Lady Helena, with her usual very simple dress, and plain, but lady-like face and figure, was listening apparently very intently to the young man, who walked by her side with every appearance of feeling on an equality.

Bertie was in shooting costume, which was very becoming to him; he had his dog with him and carried his gun on his arm. Lady Margaret, who was a great patron of dogs in general, was very intimate with

this particular one of her friend Mr. Lawson; it had been a frequent companion in her illness, and a constant attendant by her donkey-chair, so no wonder that on the occasion of this farewell ramble the child and the dog were inseparable, running about together. No less contented seemed the elder sister and her faithful attendant, and it was with pain and something like indignation against them both that I marked the terms of intimate friendship on which they appeared to stand. Helena spoke first as I came up and shook hands, whilst Mr. Lawson moved away, and lifting his hat, stepped a little on one side, saying,

“I had better walk on and ease Mrs. Norris’s mind by telling her that I met your ladyship and Lady Margaret on the moor, and that you are returning immediately.”

“Do so, please,” was the reply; and then a moment after she added—“Will

you take this paper with you that you gave me to look at?—I may not have another opportunity of returning it.”

Helena held out the paper in question, which instinct told me must be the anonymous letter. I glanced at it as Bertie held it for a moment, and saw the direction to his father, whilst he gave back a small basket he had been carrying for Daisy.

“How good of you to come and find us,” was the speech with which Lady Helena accosted me, but somehow I mistrusted the sincerity of the implied satisfaction, and suspecting her want of cordiality, I felt awkward and uncomfortable, and Lady Helena relapsed into silence after her former companion had left her, but I saw her eyes were following the tall, easy figure, with its firm, springy tread, as Bertie walked quickly away, and soon disappeared in the distance.

I dared not make a single comment on what I saw or suspected. I remembered

Lady Helena's indignation when I broached the subject the preceding day. No doubt every word of our conversation then was as vividly present to her memory as it was to mine. She appeared to me as if she were determined not to be ashamed of the companionship she had selected, as an evidence of her respect for cultivation and mental superiority—at the same time questioning in my own mind whether that superiority would have been as readily admitted had its possessor been an ordinary, clumsy-looking individual, instead of being gifted with all personal advantages, as was Bertie Lawson?

Then my thoughts reverted to the letter I had seen returned and suspected to be the anonymous one, and felt, if its contents had been a subject of discussion between them, their intimacy must have advanced very rapidly, whilst it seemed strange that the means resorted to to effect a separation

had only served to bring them nearer to each other, and on more confidential terms than ever. And yet Lady Helena would, I daresay, have declared that her friendship for the inn-keeper's son was purely platonic, and only the natural result of his transcendent merits, and her natural appreciation of his superiority.

We walked together to the door of the Inn, having said but little by the way. Helena was very absent, and seemed only to speak by effort, whilst I could find but little (and that of a very dull, stupid nature) to say. Happily Lady Margaret came to the rescue. The dog having run off with its master, she came back to her sister and me, and chatted incessantly, till we reached the end of our walk together. When we were arrived there, Lady Helena seemed suddenly to become her own kind self again. She drew me into the hall, but I said it was too late to stay. She

then suddenly kissed me with fervour, and said,

“You have been so good to us—I shall long to see you again! I will write to you at our journey’s end.” And so we parted.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 041409258